

Men-at-Arms

OSPREY
PUBLISHING

The Army of Pyrrhus of Epirus

3rd Century BC



Nicholas Sekunda • Illustrated by Peter Dennis

Men-at-Arms • 528

The Army of Pyrrhus of Epirus

3rd Century BC



Nicholas Sekunda • Illustrated by Peter Dennis

Series editor Martin Windrow

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

- **Geography of Epirus**

EPIRUS IN THE 5TH–4TH CENTURIES BC

- **The Molossian monarchy, c. 430–307 BC**
- **The early life of Pyrrhus, c. 319–297 BC**

PYRRHUS'S EARLY REIGN, 297–288 BC

- **The fall of Macedon's Antipatrid dynasty – Ambracia – first clash with Demetrius – Pyrrhus as a military writer – the partition of Macedonia, 288 BC**

PYRRHUS TURNS WEST, 281 BC

- **The battle of Heraclea, 280 BC – negotiations with Rome – the battle of Asculum, 279 BC**
- **Pyrrhus in Sicily, 278–276 BC**
- **Return to Italy – the battle of Beneventum, 275 BC**

RETURN TO EPIRUS, 274 BC

- **Failure at Sparta, 272 BC – Death in Argos – aftermath – downfall of the Aeakid dynasty**

THE ARMY OF PYRRHUS

- **The Molossian court**
- **Command and staff**
- **Cavalry: Guard cavalry – line cavalry – Ambraciot cavalry – Thessalian cavalry – mercenary cavalry – Italian allied cavalry**

- **Infantry:** The Macedonian phalanx – the Thesprotian, Chaonian and Molossian phalanxes – Epirote *logades* – the Ambraciot phalanx – the mercenary phalanx – Italian allied infantry
- **Elephants & missile troops:** elephants – slingers – archers

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

PLATE COMMENTARIES

THE ARMY OF PYRRHUS OF EPIRUS

INTRODUCTION

In most modern European languages the expression ‘Pyrrhic victory’ means a victory gained at too great a cost. This is an allusion to the words attributed to King Pyrrhus of Epirus after the battle of Asculum in 279 BC: ‘If we are victorious in one more battle with the Romans, we shall be utterly lost’ (*P.* 21. 9).

Less well known to posterity is that Pyrrhus was regarded by the ancients as one of the greatest generals of his age. When asked who was the best general, one of the most successful of Alexander the Great’s successors, Antigonus Monophthalmus ‘the One-Eyed’, replied: ‘Pyrrhus, if he lives to be old’ (*P.* 8. 3) – Pyrrhus was just 17 or 18 at the time. In a conversation between Hannibal and Scipio Africanus, when the latter was sent on a Roman embassy to Ephesus, Scipio asked Hannibal who was the greatest general of all time, to which Hannibal replied ‘Alexander’. On being asked who was the second best, Hannibal replied ‘Pyrrhus’ – and then claimed third place for himself (*Livy*, 35. 14. 5–12).¹

Pyrrhus’s military career coincided with the latter part of the ‘Wars of the Successors’ (c.323–275 BC) – the long series of struggles between Macedonian generals and other rulers who fought to carve up the vast empire briefly created by Alexander the Great. Modern opinion judges Pyrrhus to have been a fine tactician but perhaps a poor strategist, too inclined to lose focus if distracted by some new perceived opportunity. Nevertheless, the following opinion passed on him by an unknown writer was preserved by Justin, a historian of the 3rd century AD: ‘And such, they say, was this man’s grasp of military science that he remained consistently undefeated in his campaigns against the mighty kings Lysimachus, Demetrius and Antigonus; while in those against Illyrians, the Sicilians, the Romans and the Carthaginians, he was never the loser and very often emerged the victor. It is certainly true that the fame of his achievements and the glory surrounding his name brought worldwide renown to his hitherto small and insignificant country’ (*Justin* 25. 5. 4–6, trans. Yardley).²



This bust, now in Copenhagen, was identified by Wolfgang Helbig in 1893 as a portrait of Pyrrhus, on the strength of its resemblance to the bust from the Villa dei Papyri, Herculaneum (see [here](#)), and because of the oakleaf wreath (which in this image is hardly visible among the hair). Pyrrhus's appearance is discussed under **Plate C**.

The picture of Pyrrhus's character that has come down to us is of a rather humourless individual, devoted to the art of war but to little else. In an anecdote preserved in Plutarch (*P.* 8. 3), Pyrrhus is asked whether he thought Python or Kaphisias was the better flute player, to which he replied only that Polyperchon was a good general, 'implying that it became a king to be interested only in the military sciences'. We last hear of Polyperchon in 303 BC (Diod. 20. 103. 7), so Pyrrhus would have been a teenager at the time, and since he was reportedly drinking when this conversation took place he may be excused his boorish answer. (Ny Carlsberg Glyptothek, Copenhagen, I.N. 578; photo Gaius Stern)



Sketch map of Epirus in antiquity.



Silver *didrachm* struck by the Epirote Republic (c.234–168 BC). The obverse shows the jugate heads of Zeus Naios, wearing an oak wreath, and the goddess Dione. Naios means 'of flowing water', perhaps in reference to the spring for which Dodona was famous; Dione, a sky-goddess and the mother of Aphrodite, also came to be associated with the Sanctuary at Dodona. On the reverse, surrounded by an oak wreath, is an Epirote bull charging to the right. (Courtesy A. H. Baldwin & Sons Ltd)

Geography of Epirus

The territory of ancient Epirus is today divided between Greece and Albania. 'Epirus' means simply 'the mainland', and this term was applied to the part of the Balkan landmass opposite the Ionian islands, of which the largest and northernmost was Corcyra (modern Corfu). Three distinct peoples lived in ancient Epirus: the Chaonians to the north of Corcyra, the Thesprotians south of them, and the Molossians inland from the Thesprotians.

The coastline of Epirus runs diagonally from north-west to south-east, bounded to the north by the Bay of Valona, and to the south by the Bay of Arta (or Ambracian Gulf). Geologically, Epirus is composed of four limestone ranges with intervening valleys; these run roughly parallel to the coast, rising ever higher inland to the easternmost Pindos range. These four lines of massifs are much weathered, presenting precipitous cliffs on their south-western faces but only steep slopes towards their north-eastern sides.

Most rivers are channelled along the valleys between these mountain ranges. In northern Epirus the rivers flow north-west towards the Bay of Valona, and in the south they run south-west towards the Bay of Arta. The major river to the north is the Aous (mod. Vjosë), draining past the city of Apollonia; in the south the Arachthus (mod. Arta) rises on Mount Tymphe, and flows past the city of Ambracia into the Bay of Arta. The first, westernmost limestone ridge rises sheer from the sea, broken by occasional river mouths. One of these, in Thesprotia halfway between the southern tip of Corcyra and the Bay of Arta, is the river Acheron; the principal river of Epirus, its waters were supposedly bitter

to drink. In its marshy, malarial plain stood the *Nekromanteion*, a famous oracle at which the dead could be consulted.



Miniature shield (6cm across) from Dodona, probably dating to the 5th century BC. Carapanos judged the bird to be a sparrowhawk, but it is more probably the eagle of Zeus, snatching a snake in its talons. (After Carapanos 1878, pl. XXI, 3)

The Chaones inhabited the plain around Buthrotum, the principal Epirote port city, situated on the coast opposite northern Corcyra. In the valley between the first and second ridges, a little to the north of Corcyra, lay their capital, Phoinike.

The wide third massif incorporates several plateaux; here Molossia lies towards the south, with its capital at Passaron (modern Radotopion). On the most important of these plateaux stood the Sanctuary of Zeus Naios at Dodona, which passed from Thesprotian to Molossian control at the end of the 5th century BC. The oracle of Zeus at Dodona was a shrine of Panhellenic significance; at its heart was a sacred oak tree – probably one of the small *Valonia* oaks (*Quercus aegilops*) native to Greece.

Between the three constituent kingdoms of Epirus proper and Macedonia lay the peripheral communities of Parauaea (meaning ‘around the [river] Aous’) and Orestis to the east, and Tymphaia (‘around Mount Tymphe’) to the south-east. These peoples passed from Macedonian to Epirote rule when Pyrrhus first set out to enlarge his kingdom. Between Epirus and Thessaly to the east lay Athamania, and to the south of Epirus lay Ambracia, Amphilochia and Acarnania.

Notes

¹ The Latinized spelling ‘Pyrrhus’ rather than the Greek ‘Pyrrhos’ is so widely accepted that we retain it in this text. Likewise, we use the Latinized names of some other rulers and generals, e.g.: Antigonos ‘the One-Eyed’ for Antigonos, Antipater for Antipatros, Cassander for Kassandros, Demetrius for Demetrios,

Lysimachus for Lysimachos, Seleucus for Seleukos, etc. – but to help avoid confusion between two persons we have retained the spelling Antigonos Gonatas for the son of Demetrius Poliokretes.

2 Justin used excerpts from a long universal history by Pompeius Trogus, a writer of the Augustan period. Our principle source is Plutarch's *Life of Pyrrhus* (in this text, referenced *P.*). This was based largely on contemporary writings by Hieronymos of Cardia, court historian to Pyrrhus's opponent Demetrius Poliorketes, who does not always portray Pyrrhus in a favourable light. His Italian campaign is covered in books 19 and 20 of the *Roman Antiquities* of Dionysius of Halicarnassus (here, *Dion.*), a Greek writing at the time of Augustus. Further details, particularly of the Sicilian campaign, come from Diodorus Siculus (here, *Diod.*), whose 1st-century BC world history was a compilation from earlier sources.

EPIRUS IN THE 5th–4th CENTURIES BC

The Molossian monarchy, c.430–307 BC

The unification of Epirus and its peripheral areas under the Aeakid dynasty of Molossia was hindered by the survival of rival royal houses, and readers are directed to the accompanying genealogical table in order to follow the complex series of events which led Pyrrhus to the Epirote throne in 297 BC.

One of the first Molossian monarchs of whom we have historical knowledge is Tharyps (c.430–392 BC), said to have been the first ruler to introduce Greek customs and humane laws into Epirus (*P.* 1. 3). His son and successor, Alketas I, was driven from Epirus and fled to Syracuse, where he was adopted by Leptines, the father of the Tyrant Dionysius, who reinstated him on the throne of Molossia. After his restoration he became an Athenian ally: Demosthenes (49. 22) records that in 373/372 Alketas I of Molossia and Jason of Pherae stayed with the Athenian general Timotheus to testify at his trial.

On the death of Alketas his eldest son, Neoptolemus I, succeeded to the throne, and it was during his reign (370–357 BC) that a strong Molossian state began to emerge. Neoptolemus was survived by an infant son, Alexander, and a daughter, Olympias, and was therefore succeeded by his younger brother Arybbas I. Later faced by an Illyrian invasion, Arybbas secured Philip II of Macedon as an ally by marrying Olympias to him in 357, and sending his young nephew Alexander to live at the Macedonian court at Pella, where he would doubtless have been enrolled in the Macedonian ‘royal pages’ (*basilikoi paides*). In about 342 BC, when Alexander had attained the age of 20, Philip deposed Arybbas and installed Alexander I on the throne of Epirus, though annexing Parauaea and Orestis to Macedonia in compensation.



Coin struck c.360–325 BC, so almost certainly during the reign of Alexander I of Epirus. The obverse bears the image of a hoplite shield decorated with the thunderbolt of Zeus, surrounded on the rim by the legend 'of the Molossians'. (Drawing by Natalia Kozłowska)

In 332 BC, Alexander I of Molossia crossed over to Italy at the request of the Tarentines, to help them against their neighbours the Lucanians and the Bruttians. According to Aristotle (frag. 614), he sailed with 15 warships and many merchant vessels including cavalry transports. After he won victories over the Samnites and Lucanians he made a treaty with the Romans. In 326, however, Alexander was compelled to engage in battle under unfavourable circumstances, and fell by the hand of a Lucanian exile. He left a son, the future Neoptolemus II.

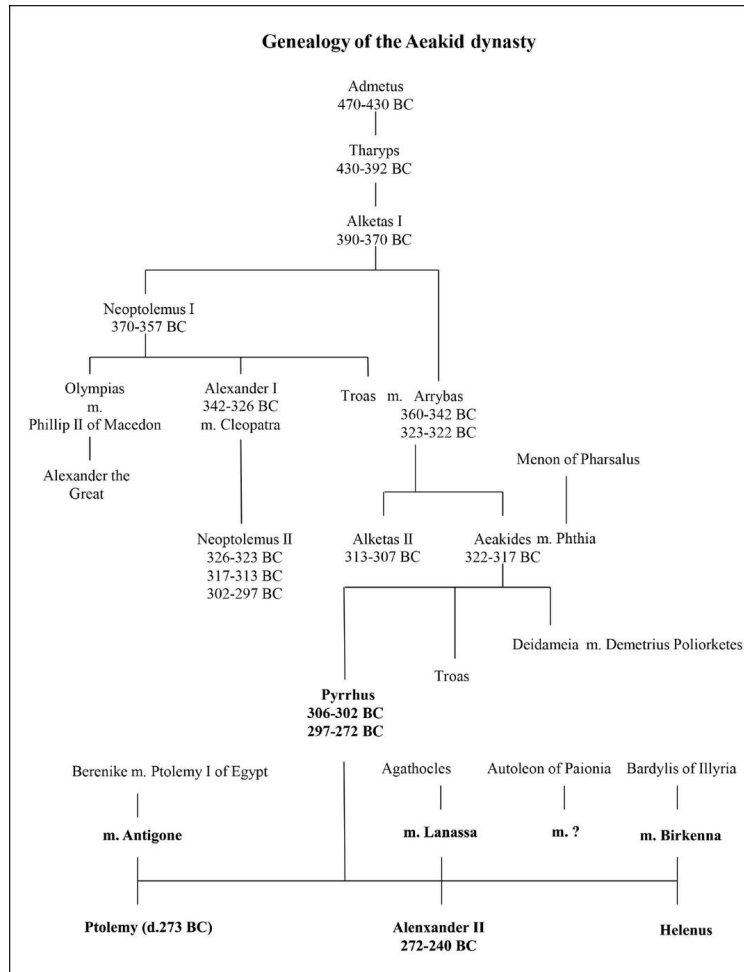


Diagram by Andrew Sekunda

The early life of Pyrrhus, c.319–297 BC

At the time of the death of Alexander I of Molossia his son Neoptolemus was a minor, so his cousin, Aeakides the son of Arybbas, succeeded to the throne. Aeakides married Phthia, the daughter of Menon of Pharsalus, by whom he fathered Pyrrhus in 319 BC, and two daughters, Deidameia and Troias.

Cassander, son of Antipater, was then ruling as regent in Macedonia. In 317 BC a former regent, Polyperchon, allied with Aeakides of Epirus to restore the latter's aunt Olympias, and her grandson the five-year-old Alexander IV (the son of Alexander the Great), to power. When Cassander besieged Olympias in Pydna, Aeakides went to her aid, but his troops rebelled and he was deposed, and after her capture Olympias was killed. Aeakides took shelter among the Aetolians, enemies of Cassander, while the two-year-old Pyrrhus was taken by a loyal friend of his father to the court of Glaukias, the ruler of an Illyrian people

called the Taulantians. The Molossians put Neoptolemus II, the son of Alexander I, on the throne.

Three years later the Epirotes recalled Aeakides, and Neoptolemus II fled to the court of Cassander of Macedon, who immediately sent an army against Aeakides and defeated and killed him. He was succeeded by his elder brother Alketas II, who had previously been barred from the throne on account of his ungovernable temper. Cassander sent an army against him too, but later preferred to come to an accommodation with Alketas rather than restore Neoptolemus II to the throne.



Epirote bronze coin struck about 300 BC, showing three doves and the sacred oak at Dodona, which was by then dying (see **Plate B**). According to Herodotus (2. 54–55), two black doves flew from the Sanctuary of Zeus in Egyptian Thebes, one to the oracle of Zeus Ammon in Libya and the other to Dodona. This second dove settled upon an oak tree, and with a human voice proclaimed that there should be an oracle of Zeus there. In the cult at Dodona the dove was sacred to Dione. (Drawing by Natalia Kozłowska)

In about 310 BC, Cassander had Alexander the Great's son Alexander IV and his mother Roxana killed, thus eliminating the last legitimate rival for the throne. In 307 a sworn enemy of Cassander, Antigonus 'the One-Eyed', Alexander the Great's successor as ruler of Asia Minor, sent his own son Demetrius Poliorketes, 'the Besieger of Cities', to invade Greece; he started with Athens, and the position of Cassander was severely weakened. The Molossians, tired of outrages committed by the unstable Alketas, rose up and killed him and his two sons. Pyrrhus, now aged 11 or 12, was restored to the Epirote throne by his protector Glaukias, and his sister Deidameia was married to Demetrius Poliorketes. However, after ruling as a minor until 302 Pyrrhus was again driven into exile by Cassander, and replaced with Neoptolemus II.

At the age of 17, Pyrrhus left for Asia Minor and found service with his brother-in-law Demetrius Poliorketes. Demetrius's aged father Antigonus 'the One-Eyed' was ambitious to reunite the empire of Alexander the Great, and over

the next couple of years Pyrrhus doubtless learned a lot about generalship from Demetrius, including siege techniques, encampment, and the use of elephants in battle. However, in 301 BC Antigonos was confronted in the battle of Ipsus by four other regional Successors (Lysimachus of Thrace, Seleucus of Babylon and Persia, Cassander of Macedon, and Ptolemy I of Egypt); Antigonos was killed, and Demetrius was forced to negotiate.

When Demetrius agreed a peace with Ptolemy I, Pyrrhus offered to go to the latter's Egyptian court as a hostage. In about 299 Demetrius's wife Deidameia died; around the same time relations between Ptolemy and Demetrius started to break down, and Ptolemy decided to make Pyrrhus an ally. Ptolemy's wife Berenike had a daughter, Antigone, from a previous marriage; Pyrrhus married Antigone, and had his first son by her (who was named Ptolemy). In time King Ptolemy decided to restore Pyrrhus to his kingdom, and gave him troops and money to achieve this. Pyrrhus returned to Molossia in about 297, at the age of 23. Neoptolemus II was unpopular, and Pyrrhus soon had him assassinated.

PYRRHUS'S EARLY REIGN, 297–288 BC

At first Pyrrhus's rule was confined to Molossia and the Epirote alliance. He established the city of Berenike on the peninsula of Prevesa in commemoration of his mother-in-law, and also Antigonea (probably at Lekel) in Chaonia.

In the first couple of years after Pyrrhus's accession two opportunities for territorial expansion arose which would double the territory under his rule. In 295 BC (by which time his first wife Antigone was probably dead) he married Lanassa, the daughter of Agathocles, Tyrant of Syracuse, and as a dowry received Corcyra and possibly other Ionian islands; Lanassa bore Pyrrhus's second son, who would become Alexander II.

The fall of Macedon's Antipatrid dynasty

Cassander of Macedon died in 297 BC, and his son Philip IV only four months later. On the instigation of Cassander's widow, Thessalonike, Philip IV's two brothers Antipater and Alexander agreed to rule jointly. Antipater could not have been more than 16, and was susceptible to the pressure of his mother, who favoured Alexander. This joint monarchy lasted until 294, when Antipater murdered his mother and drove out his brother. Alexander appealed for help to Pyrrhus of Epirus and Demetrius Poliorketes, who was then campaigning in the Peloponnese.

Pyrrhus intervened on Alexander's behalf, but in return for his aid he demanded the Macedonian-occupied provinces of Tymphaia and Parauaea, and other vassal regions of the Macedonian throne – Ambracia, Acarnania and Amphilochoia. In addition Pyrrhus seized Atintania, which lay on his side of Parauaea. Presumably the former Macedonian border provinces were simply annexed to Molossia and Chaonia, but the constitutional position of Ambracia, Acarnania and Amphilochoia is unclear. A poorly documented inscription (*IG IX* i²207), which disappeared soon after it was found in 1868, appears to record a treaty between the Acarnanians and Pyrrhus.



Bronze fragment from a statue of a general found at Dodona and now in Ioannina Museum (Inv. 1373), representing the hilt of a recurved sabre shaped as an eagle's head. Though it dates to the later 3rd century, the symbolism would be appropriate for Pyrrhus 'the Eagle', as he was styled after his victory over Pantauchos in 291 BC. (Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports, Ephorate of Antiquities of Ioannina)

Lysimachus of Thrace supported Antipater, but, busy with another campaign, he encouraged Pyrrhus to mediate peace between the two brothers; this he did, departing from Macedonia. Meanwhile, Demetrius Poliorketes, reacting late to Alexander's earlier letters, set out with his forces to join him. After Alexander told him that his help was no longer necessary, Demetrius had him murdered. Late in 294 BC Demetrius Poliorketes established himself on the throne, becoming the first member of the Antigonid dynasty to rule Macedonia, although he chose to reside in Athens.

Ambracia

Pyrrhus moved the capital of his extended kingdom to Ambracia, where he built his palace, and that city entered an age of exceptional prosperity (Strabo 7.7.6). The 'Pyrrheum' mentioned by Livy (38. 5 .2) in his account of the Roman siege of the city in 189 BC is presumably the palace built by Pyrrhus. On that occasion the Roman consul Marcus Fulvius Nobilior, in the course of a campaign principally directed against the Aetolians, stripped the city of its statues and paintings 'with which Ambracia was more lavishly adorned than the other cities of the region, because the Palace of Pyrrhus had been there' (Livy 38. 9. 13; cf. Polyb. 21. 30. 9). In his triumph the general Manius Acilius Glabrio displayed

785 bronze and 230 marble statues, as well as 83,000 pounds of silver and 243 of gold, and in coin 118,000 Attic 4-drachma pieces, and 12,322 'Philippi' coins (Livy 39.5.15) – all loot taken from Aetolia, Kephallenia and Ambracia.

First clash with Demetrius

The seizure of the Macedonian throne by Demetrius Poliorketes had given Pyrrhus a powerful and potentially dangerous neighbour, and it was probably at this point that he contracted two further political marriages to secure his position. First, he married an unnamed daughter of King Autoleon of the Paionians, and then Birkenna, a daughter of Bardylis of Illyria, who bore his youngest son Helenus. Pyrrhus brought his three sons up to be fiery and brave in arms; when asked by one of them to whom he intended to leave the kingdom, he replied 'to the one that keeps his sword the sharpest' (*P.* 9. 2).

Hearing in 291 BC that Demetrius was becoming bogged down in a siege of Thebes, Pyrrhus overran Thessaly, but beat a hasty retreat when Demetrius moved against him. Demetrius first invaded Aetolia, where he left his best general Pantauchos while he went on to plunder Epirus. The armies of Demetrius and Pyrrhus unintentionally passed one another by, and Pyrrhus found himself in Aetolia, where Pantauchos challenged him to single combat. Pyrrhus accepted, and was victorious. The Epirotes then routed the Macedonian phalanx and took 5,000 prisoners, boasting that at last they had a true descendent of Achilles to lead them. (In his work *Epeirotika*, Proxenos, probably a historian at Pyrrhus's court, propagated a mythical lineage from Achilles to Pyrrhus. Proxenos, rather than Pyrrhus himself, was probably also the author of the 'royal memoirs'.)



Despite his reportedly single-minded character, a passage by Pliny the Elder (*HN* 37.6) suggests that Pyrrhus did have an artistic side. Pliny notes that, second only to the ring worn by Polykrates, Tyrant of Samos, ‘the most renowned gemstone is that of another king, the famous Pyrrhus who fought a war against Rome. He is said to have possessed an agate on which could be seen the Nine Muses, with Apollo holding his lyre.’ The quality of such work is perhaps exemplified by this early Hellenistic gem of blue chalcedony showing a single Muse; found in Achaia, it is now in the British Museum. (Author’s photo)

It was after this victory that Pyrrhus came to be called ‘the Eagle’ by the Epirotes. ‘Through you,’ Pyrrhus told them, ‘I am an eagle, and [it is] through your arms that I am borne aloft as by swift wings’ (*P.* 10.1). Significantly, his Macedonian opponents were equally impressed by Pyrrhus; they began to say that while other kings resembled Alexander the Great in their outward trappings, Pyrrhus was the only one to match him in deeds of arms (*P.* 8. 1).

Pyrrhus’s two new marriages had unexpectedly volatile consequences. Lanassa quarrelled with Pyrrhus for paying too much attention to his barbarian wives; retiring to Corcyra, she offered both the island and her hand to Demetrius Poliorketes. Demetrius sailed to Corcyra, left a garrison there, and sailed back to Athens with his new bride (his fourth wife) in the late summer of 290. A little while later, learning that Demetrius was dangerously ill, Pyrrhus invaded Macedonia, though intending merely to overrun parts of it and gather plunder. He got as far as Edessa without opposition, but soon retreated when Demetrius’s ‘friends’ and commanders gathered forces against him. (In this context a ‘friend’, *philos*, was one of a small group of a king’s intimate companions-in-arms and advisors. Borrowed from the Achaemenid Persians, the term started to be used as an honorific title at Hellenistic courts. For clarity, we use it with quotation marks in this text.)

Pyrrhus as a military writer

The next few years in the life of Pyrrhus were relatively (and unusually) tranquil, and it was probably during this period that he produced most of his literary works.

Aelian, in the introduction to his *Taktikē Theōria*, gives a list of earlier Greek military writers, and mentions that Pyrrhus of Epirus wrote a *Taktika* – a book on how to draw up an army. Plutarch (*P.* 8. 2) mentions that Pyrrhus left behind him writings on ‘tactics and generalship’; and finally, Cicero (*Ad. Fam.* 114 / 9.25. 1) praises Pyrrhus for his works (plural) on the art of war. From this we may conclude that Pyrrhus himself wrote a book of *Taktika* and presumably one ‘On Generalship’ (*peri stratēgias*), and perhaps others besides. Not one of these has survived, but perhaps some of the material set out in them may be deduced.

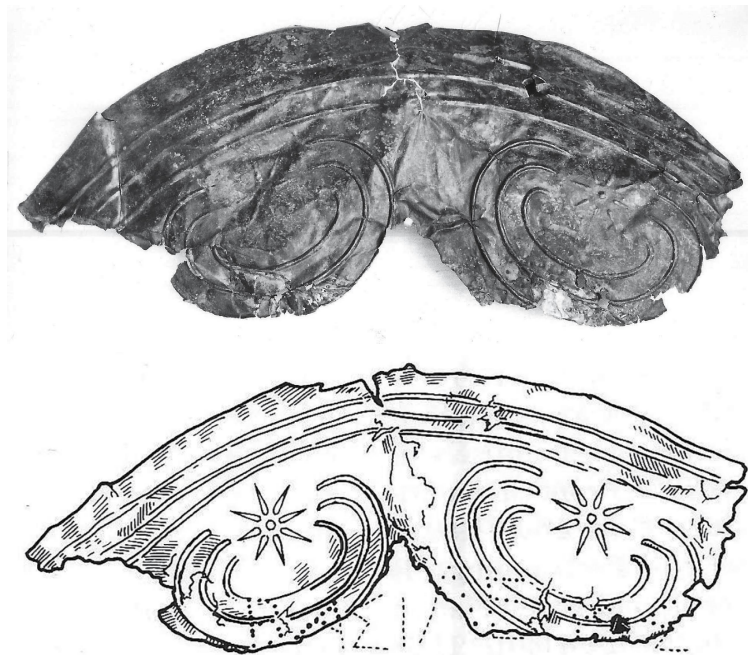
There is a passage in Polyaeus's *Stratagems* (6. 6. 3) that may be derived from an introductory passage from the *peri stratēgias*; this runs 'Pyrrhus recommended persuading the enemy by fear, by avarice, by lust, by compassion, by justice, by law, by profit or by power before war'. Most of the eleven sections featuring Pyrrhus in Frontinus's *Stratagems* are clearly based on historical incidents, but we also read (2. 6. 10) that Pyrrhus 'among many other precepts on the art of war, recommended never to press relentlessly on the heels of an enemy in flight, not merely in order to prevent the enemy from resisting too furiously out of necessity, but in order to make him inclined to withdraw another time, knowing that the victor would not strive to destroy him when in flight'. This too might be derived from a passage in the *peri stratēgias*.

In the reported conversation between Scipio Africanus and Hannibal mentioned in the Introduction above, Hannibal says that Pyrrhus 'had been the first to teach the art of castramentation' (Livy 35. 14. 8). It is difficult to see how Pyrrhus could have 'taught' castramentation if it was not through his writings. Greek armies had started to fortify their camps with stockades in the 4th century BC; between 305 and 302 BC both Demetrius and Lysimachus had started to employ the triple *charax* (stockade) in their encampments. Pyrrhus lived in an age when the art of castramentation was developing rapidly, but we cannot be sure if his work on the subject was a separate book in its own right, or a section of the *peri stratēgias*.



Macedonian coin of 'shield/ helmet' type, probably struck in Pella in 288–284 BC during Pyrrhus's period of rule over part of the partitioned kingdom of Macedonia. It shows on the obverse a Macedonian shield with the king's monogram 'ΠΥ' (see [Plate E3](#)). The area between the tondo and the rim is decorated with six sets of double crescents, the points towards the rim. They are separated by single pellets, and another is centred inside each double crescent. The rim is double, with an intervening row of pellets. On the reverse is a helmet of the *pilos* type with a wide flaring brim, and a tall crown tapering to a point ending probably in a crest-holder, all surrounded by an oak wreath. (©The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved)

Pyrrhus ‘the Macedonian’ is cited by Athenaios Mechanicus (6) as the writer of a work called the *Poliorketikōn organōn*, or ‘Siege Devices’. Most modern scholars identify this with King Pyrrhus of Epirus, and indeed, during the period of his rule in Macedonia after 288 BC he could rightly be termed ‘Pyrrhus the Macedonian’. Vitruvius (7 *praef.* 14) lists one Pyrrhus as an author who wrote on the rules of symmetry, and, if the author in question is our King Pyrrhus, it is difficult to see that he would have written on this subject other than in his work on ‘Siege Devices’. Pyrrhus, this time without an ethnic epithet, is mentioned a second time by Athenaios Mechanicus (31) as the author of a separate work called *Poliorketika* or ‘Siegecraft’, a book ‘concerning mines and the construction of covered ways, and the practicalities of how to use them’.



Fragment of a Macedonian shield found at Dodona during excavations in 1968, now in Ioannina Museum (Inv. 1951); it was probably captured during the partition of Macedonia in 288 BC. An inscription has been plausibly restored to read ‘King Pyrrhus and the Epirotes, [taken] from the Macedonians, [dedicated] to Zeus Naios’. This differs from the more elaborate inscription on the shields captured in 274 BC, quoted in the text on [here](#). (Photo courtesy Ephorate of Antiquities, Ioannina; drawing by Natalia Kozłowska)

The partition of Macedonia, 288 BC

Demetrius Poliorketes had been gathering strong forces in an attempt to win back the dominions of his late father Antigonus ‘the One-Eyed’, and this concentration threatened all his neighbours. In 288 BC Pyrrhus entered into an agreement with Lysimachus of Thrace to bring about the downfall of Demetrius.

Lysimachus invaded Macedonia from the east, and Demetrius set out to meet him; however, he feared that his troops might go over to Lysimachus, who was a Macedonian veteran of Alexander the Great's army. When Pyrrhus invaded from the west and encamped at Beroea, Demetrius turned towards him, thinking that, as a foreigner, he would have little appeal for the Macedonians – which proved to be a false assumption.

Pyrrhus sent his agents into the Macedonian camp, while the majority of the Macedonian army actually went looking for Pyrrhus. Some of them ran up to him and asked him for his watchword, while others put on wreaths of oakleaves 'because they saw the soldiers around him wreathed'. Presumably these oakleaf wreaths were field-signs worn by the Epirotes to distinguish themselves from the Macedonians, who were similarly clad and armed. With his army deserting him, Demetrius slipped away incognito. Pausanias (1. 12. 3) presumably refers to this occasion when he mentions that 'Pyrrhus captured his beasts [elephants] in the battle with Demetrius'. Pyrrhus and Lysimachus subsequently divided Macedonia between them, but their agreement was short-lived.

Pyrrhus now campaigned in Thessaly to help the Greeks expel Demetrius's garrisons. He entered Athens, and the citizens celebrated his visit by erecting a statue in his honour. In 285 BC Demetrius Poliorketes invaded Asia Minor, but was captured by Seleucus, ruler of the Babylonian and Persian territories of Alexander the Great's former empire; Demetrius would die in captivity in 283. Lysimachus of Thrace then turned against Pyrrhus, and drove him back from Macedonia into Epirus.

It would have been about this time that Kineas the Thessalian, born c.355, entered Pyrrhus's service. The introduction to Aelian's *Taktikē Theōria* mentions that Kineas wrote an *epitome* of Aeneas's *Tacticus*, perhaps to make it accessible to a younger reader. In about 285 Pyrrhus's eldest son Ptolemy would have been entering his teens, and requiring a tutor. I suggest that it was this opportunity that brought Kineas to the Aeakid court.

PYRRHUS TURNS WEST, 281 BC

In 281 BC Lysimachus of Thrace was defeated at Korupedion by Seleucus of Babylon, and Seleucus crossed the Hellespont intending to occupy Thrace and Macedonia – only to be murdered by Ptolemy I's son Ptolemy Keraunos, 'the Thunderbolt'. Seleucus's successor Antiochus was forced to withdraw his forces to Asia to quell internal revolts, leaving Ptolemy Keraunos to establish his rule in Macedonia. Ptolemy defeated an attempt on the throne by Antigonos Gonatas, son of Demetrius Poliorketes, and established good relations with Pyrrhus.

Meanwhile the Tarentines, against whom the Romans had declared war, and other Greek colonies in Italy, sent an embassy to Pyrrhus in the summer of 281, begging his aid, and promising to provide him with a force of Lucanians, Messapians, Samnites and Tarentines amounting to 20,000 cavalry and 350,000 infantry (*P.* 13. 6 – though the latter figure is incredible). Pyrrhus was already in the debt of the Tarentines for sending a fleet to help him during his war with Corcyra (*Paus.* 1. 12.1). Pyrrhus sought a prediction from the oracle at Dodona, and when he received the reply 'If you cross to Italy, you shall conquer Romans' he decided not even to wait for the spring (*Dio Cassius* 9. 40. 5).



Roman weapons and armour have been found at a number of sites in Epirus (Völling, 1997): *pilum*-heads from the *Nekromanteion*, and the skull of a helmet of Montefortino Type A from Polydrosso, also in Thesprotia. From Corfu comes a cheek-piece inscribed 'IVIBI'; and from Dodona two others (illustrated here); and a possible Roman sword, probably war booty from Pyrrhus's Italian campaign. (Author's photo)

In autumn 281 BC Pyrrhus sent an advanced force of 3,000 men to Tarentum under command of the courtier Kineas (*P.* 15. 1). According to Justin (17. 2; 25. 3. 4) and Zonaras (8. 2. 8), the force was led by Pyrrhus's most trusted general and 'friend' Milon, who took possession of the acropolis of Tarentum to serve as

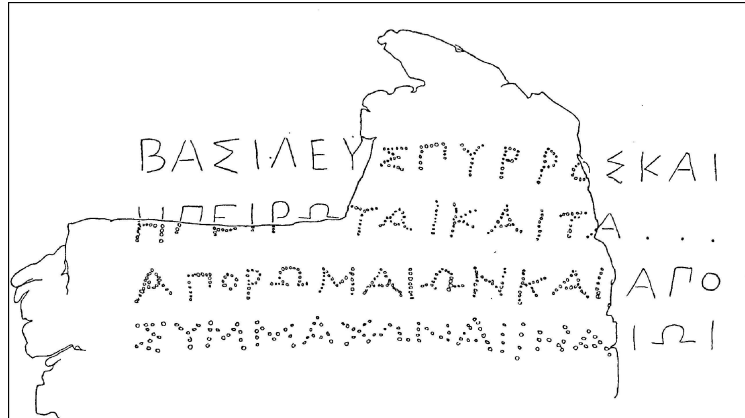
quarters for the king when he arrived, and superintended the manning of the walls. Since Kineas must have been at least in his mid-sixties, presumably he dealt with the diplomatic aspects of the mission and Milon the military; Pyrrhus said of Kineas that '[his words] had won more cities for him than his own arms'.

Pyrrhus asked Antigonos Gonatas for ships to transport his army to Italy, Antiochus for money to support the expedition, and Ptolemy Keraunos for Macedonian soldiers (Justin 17. 2. 13). The first two appeals were probably unsuccessful, since it was the Tarentines who sent numerous horse-transports, decked warships, and all sorts of transport vessels to ferry Pyrrhus's army (*P.* 15. 1). The king embarked with 3,000 horse, 20,000 foot, 2,000 archers, 500 slingers and 20 elephants (*P.* 15. 1). The number of elephants is supported by Zonaras (8. 2) and Orosius (4. 1. 6). Justin (17. 2. 14) states that Keraunos provided him, for no more than two years' service, with 5,000 Macedonian infantry, 4,000 cavalry, and 50 elephants; the difference suggests that Pyrrhus did not take up the offer of 50 additional elephants. Pyrrhus was now 37 years old; while abroad, he left as guardian of his kingdom his 15-year-old son Ptolemy by his first wife Antigone (Justin 18. 1).

The fleet may have sailed from the naval station on the Bay of Arta mentioned by Strabo (7. 7. 6). The main force was dispersed by a storm; many of the ships foundered and their passengers were drowned. The original total number embarked was 25,500. Of these, only 16,000 remained to participate in the battle of Asculum in 279 (Dion. 20. 1. 8) – but that, of course, was after more than a year of campaigning, including the costly battle of Heraclea. All the 20 elephants seem to have made it safely to Italy.

The battle of Heraclea, 280 BC

Once the greater part of his forces were assembled, Pyrrhus drew up a register of all Tarentines liable for military service (*P.* 16. 2), and subjected them to military training, under penalty of death (Appian, *Sam.* 8). The remark to a recruiting officer which Frontinus (*Strat.* 4. 1. 3) attributes to Pyrrhus probably dates from this period: 'You pick out the big men, and I will make them brave'.



This bronze shield fragment found at Dodona is preserved in the National Museum, Athens (EAM Kar. 514). It is inscribed as follows (Syll 392³, *SGDI* 1368): '[KIN]G PYRRHU[S AND] / THE EPIROTES AND THE T[ARENTINES] / FROM THE ROMANS AND [THEIR] / ALLIES TO ZEUS NA[IOS]'. As only the Epirotes and the Tarentines are named, the dedication was of booty taken at Heraclea, since other allies were present at the other battles. The Romans did not use bronze shields, so this must have been taken from one of their allied contingents. (Drawing after Carapanos)



Pyrrhus wanted to make Locri the capital of his Italian possessions; this silver *tetradrachm*, a masterpiece of early Hellenistic art, was struck there in c.280–277. It shows (obverse) the head of Zeus Naïos wearing an oak wreath, and (reverse) Dione enthroned. (Courtesy A. H. Baldwin & Sons Ltd)

The Romans attempted to strike at Pyrrhus before he could be joined by his Samnite and Lucanian allies, and an army was sent into Etruscan territory to forestall any possibility of a rising. An army under Publius Valerius Laevinus marched through Lucania towards Tarentum, and Pyrrhus marched out to meet them with his available forces, including those Tarentines that he had had time to train.

The two armies, their strengths unknown, met on the banks of the Siris river between the towns of Heraclea and Pandosia. While Pyrrhus's Thessalian cavalry delivered the final blow, his victory was in large part due to his

elephants: the Romans had no idea what they were, and called them ‘Lucanian oxen’ (Pliny *NH* 8. 16).

Dionysius writes that 15,000 fell on the Roman side, but Hieronymus of Cardia says only 7,000 (*P.* 17. 4). Of Pyrrhus’s troops, Dionysius claims that 13,000 fell, but Hieronymus fewer than 4,000. These were his best troops, however, and Pyrrhus lost some of the ‘friends’ and generals whom he trusted most. His Lucanian and Samnite allies only joined him after the battle. Pyrrhus criticised them for being late, but he was proud that with his own troops and the Tarentines alone he had defeated such a great force of Romans.

Negotiations with Rome

Pyrrhus took 1,800 prisoners at Heraclea (Eutropius 2. 11), including noble cavalymen thrown from horses terrified by the elephants. The Romans sent an embassy headed by G. Fabricius Luscinius to negotiate their release; Milon advised Pyrrhus neither to hand over the captives nor to make peace, but the venerable diplomat Kineas was of a different opinion. Pyrrhus tried to give presents to Fabricius, and then to terrify him by concealing his largest elephant behind a curtain and revealing it at an appropriate moment; Fabricius responded that ‘Your gold did not move me yesterday, and your beast does not today’. Pyrrhus gave his Roman prisoners leave to go home to celebrate the Saturnalia with their families, Fabricius carrying with him a peace proposal for the Senate. All these parolees kept their word, and returned to Pyrrhus’s camp thereafter.

Pyrrhus sent Kineas to Rome to continue negotiations; we are told that the day after his arrival, thanks to his wonderful memory, he was able to address all the senators and *equites* by name. While on this mission Kineas made it his business ‘to observe the life and manners of the Romans, and to understand the excellences of their form of government’. The Senate rejected his proposals, but Kineas stayed long enough to witness the eagerness with which Romans volunteered to be enrolled for the next campaign. On his return, he told Pyrrhus: ‘We are waging war against a Lernean hydra’ (*P.* 19. 4-5) – referring to the mythical serpent slain by Hercules. As soon as one of its heads was cut off, another grew to take its place: so it was with Roman legions.



Gold *stater* struck at Syracuse, 278 BC. The obverse shows the head of Athena wearing a Corinthian helmet ornamented with a pegasus. On the reverse, within the legend 'of King Pyrrhus', a Winged Victory holds in her right hand a wreath of oakleaves, sacred to Zeus Naios, and in her left a trophy made up of a helmet, cuirass and *thureos* shield. (Courtesy A. H. Baldwin & Sons Ltd)

Meanwhile, the Bruttians had come over to Pyrrhus, including their most important city Locri Epizephrii, 'Locri towards the West' (modern Gerace), a colony of the Locrians from central Greece. Now united with the Samnites, the Lucanians and the Bruttians, Pyrrhus advanced against Rome through Campania and Latium, where many cities welcomed him. He reached Praeneste, only 18 miles from Rome (Eutropius 2. 12), but failed to take that city. With winter approaching, he was forced to desert his new Latin allies; he wintered his forces in Campania, while himself returning to Tarentum.

The battle of Asculum, 279 BC

When the next campaigning season opened Pyrrhus had no option but to march against Rome once more. He invaded and occupied large parts of Apulia, and met the Roman forces for the second time at Asculum (modern Ascoli di Satriano, a town inland from modern Pescara, a little north of Rome but on the eastern side of the Apennines). The Romans placed great hopes on 300 special wagons that they had devised to counter Pyrrhus's elephants (see **Plate H**), but these were immobilized by the archers and slingers that he deployed among the animals. Even so, we read that Gaius Numucius, a *hastatus* of the 4th Legion, cut off one elephant's trunk (Florus 1. 13. 9).

Unsurprisingly, different ancient sources give various numbers for the forces engaged and for their casualties, and – as always – many invite scepticism. According to Dionysius (20. 1. 8), Pyrrhus's forces consisted of 70,000 foot, more than 8,000 cavalry and 19 elephants. The Romans had more than 70,000 in all, including about 20,000 Roman citizens organized in four legions, and 8,000 cavalry; and in the battle more than 15,000 men fell on each side. Plutarch (*P.*

21. 8–9) quotes Hieronymus as stating that according to the ‘royal commentaries’ 6,000 Romans and 3,505 of Pyrrhus’s army were killed, although this may refer to the closing stages of the battle only. Frontinus (*Strat.* 2. 3. 21) states that 40,000 men fought on each side, with Pyrrhus losing half his forces but the Romans only some 5,000. Most modern scholars prefer Frontinus’s figures, which are supported by Eutropius (2. 13) and Orosius (4. 1. 22). This is the occasion when Pyrrhus is quoted as replying to someone who was congratulating him on his victory: ‘If we are victorious in one more battle with the Romans, we shall be utterly lost’ (*P.* 21. 9). Many of his remaining ‘friends’ and generals fell at Asculum, and he himself was seriously wounded.

Lack of supplies then forced Pyrrhus to retreat to Tarentum (*Zon.* 8. 5). The Romans’ allies went back to their cities, and the Roman army went into winter quarters in Apulia. Pyrrhus sent to Epirus for reinforcements and money, but his son Ptolemy had problems of his own. At some point he had recaptured Corcyra; he had distinguished himself in a naval engagement, where he leapt from a boat with seven men into a 50-oared galley, and captured it (*Justin* 25. 4. 8). Meanwhile, however, great numbers of ‘Galatian’ (Gallic) warriors had flooded south from the northern Balkans into Macedonia, killing Ptolemy Keraunos in battle in February 279.³ For the moment Pyrrhus’s son Ptolemy kept them out of Epirus, but we hear from Appian (*Sam.* 11. 1) that Pyrrhus was disturbed by ‘the rumours concerning the Molossians’.

Agathocles of Syracuse had died in 289 BC, and Pyrrhus, his son-in-law, now ‘began to look upon Sicily, rather than Italy, as his natural possession’ (Appian *Sam.* 10. 5). Delegations arrived from Agrigentum, Syracuse, and Leontini, offering him leadership of Sicily if he would drive out the Carthaginians and suppress the tyrants. The Carthaginians were already laying siege to Syracuse, whose divided defenders were led by Sosistratus and Thoenon. Clearly frustrated by his failure to bring his Italian campaign to a decisive end, Pyrrhus now concentrated on extricating himself by agreeing terms with Rome.

The election of Fabricius as consul rekindled hopes of peace. Before he arrived at Pyrrhus’s camp the consul sent the king warning of a plot against him by one Nikias, a ‘friend’. Pyrrhus had a throne (or the driving-board of a chariot: in Greek, the same word) fitted with straps made from Nikias’s flayed skin (*Zon.* 8. 6), and some reciprocal gesture seemed necessary. He released all his Roman prisoners, giving them new clothes and money for the journey, and sending Kineas with them to negotiate. The Romans released an equal number of Tarentine and Samnite captives. It is unclear whether any formal truce was agreed, since we only have Justin’s word for it (18. 2. 6). However, at about the end of May 278 BC Pyrrhus set sail from Tarentum. He left his second son

Alexander at Locri, and secured the cities of his Italian allies with strong garrisons (Justin 18. 2. 12), including one in Tarentum commanded by Milon (Zon. 8. 5).

Pyrrhus in Sicily, 278–276 BC

Pyrrhus left Tarentum with his elephants, horsemen and perhaps 8,000 infantry (Appian *Sam.* 11. 2). He put in at Locri, crossed the straits, received the Tyrant of Tauromenium into his alliance along with some troops, and disembarked his infantry at Catana. Advancing to Syracuse, he raised the Carthaginian siege and received the submission of Sosistratus and Thoenon – together with the Syracusan treasury, military stores, engines of war and other equipment. Ships totalling 120 decked vessels, 20 without decks, and the flagship with nine banks of oars brought his fleet up to 200 ships. Envoys sent by Heracleides of Leontini arrived in Syracuse, offering to hand over the city and its forts to Pyrrhus, and to provide him with 4,000 infantry and 500 cavalry.

On the way to Acragas, messengers arrived from Enna saying that they had expelled the Carthaginian garrison, and promising to hand over the city and become his allies. At Acragas, Pyrrhus took over from Sosistratus that and some 30 other vassal towns, together with 8,000 infantry and 800 horsemen – all picked troops (*epilektoi*), ‘no whit inferior to the Epirotes’ (Diod. 22. 10. 1).

Pyrrhus then sent to Syracuse for his siege engines, and crossed over into Carthaginian territory with an army of 30,000 infantry, 1,500 cavalry and his elephants (Diod. 22. 10. 2; according to *P.* 22. 4, 2,500 horse). After he took Heraclea and Azones, Selinous, Halikyai and Segesta came over to Pyrrhus. He laid siege to the Carthaginian garrison of Eryx, and personally led the assault on the walls accompanied by his ‘friends’ (Diod. 22. 10. 3). Iactia surrendered, and after he stormed Panormus and Herktai the only Carthaginian possession left in Sicily was Lilybaeum.

The Carthaginians tried to make peace, offering Pyrrhus large sums of money if he would leave them Lilybaeum. Pyrrhus assembled a meeting of his ‘friends’ and delegates from the Sicilian cities (Diod. 22. 10. 6), who urged him to take Lilybaeum (the cautious old Kineas is thought to have died shortly before this debate). Failing to take the city after a two-month siege, Pyrrhus resolved to construct a large fleet and take his war against the Carthaginians to North Africa – a characteristic response.

First, however, he moved against the Mamertini, ‘sons of Mamers’ (the Oscan form of the Latin war-god Mars), who were Campanian mercenaries recruited by Agathocles. After the latter’s death they seized the city of Messana, from which they dominated and plundered north-east Sicily. Pyrrhus put their tribute-

collectors to death, destroyed many of their strongholds, and confined them to Messana itself.

At some point, Pyrrhus was proclaimed King of Sicily. He appointed his youngest son Helenus as his heir, and his second son Alexander as heir to the kingdom of Italy (Justin 23. 3). Pyrrhus garrisoned the cities, and handed over to his own 'friends' the estates that Agathocles had given to his relatives and supporters. Contrary to local law, he also assigned the chief magistracies in the cities to his own 'shield-bearers' (*hypaspistai*) and captains (*lochagoi*) (Dion. 20. 8. 1). He put some prominent citizens to death, alleging that they were plotting to bring in the Carthaginians. Deeply suspicious of Sosistratus of Syracuse, Pyrrhus planned to arrest him; he escaped, but Thoenon was executed. Oarsmen were drafted to serve in the huge fleet that Pyrrhus planned, and taxes were imposed to fund it.



Pyrrhus struck this silver *diadrachm* in Locri in c.279–274 BC. The obverse shows the head of Achilles, in which some have thought to see the features of Pyrrhus himself; the pseudo-Corinthian helmet decorated with a crest and a griffin has the 'folded' neckguard of Boeotian style. The reverse shows Achilles's mother Thetis riding on a hippocamp to bring new weapons to her son. (Courtesy A. H. Baldwin & Sons Ltd)



The obverse of this 3rd-century bronze coin struck by the Bruttians, showing Ares (Mars), clearly mimics the shape of the helmet worn by Achilles on the Locrian coin opposite. The reverse shows

Hera Hoplosmia advancing her hoplite shield with both hands, with her spear leaning against her shoulder. (National Museum, Warsaw, 107827 MNW; photos Piotr Ligier)

Unsurprisingly, Pyrrhus was no longer popular in Sicily, being widely regarded as a tyrant. When the Carthaginians sent a new fleet to the island many cities joined them, while others called in the Mamertini. When Pyrrhus received letters from the Samnites (who had lost a large part of their territories to the Romans) and Tarentines begging him for help, he changed his focus yet again, deciding to return to Italy in the autumn of 276 BC.

Return to Italy

His passage was opposed. Pyrrhus sailed with 110 decked ships and a larger number of transports, of which the expert Carthaginian navy reportedly sank 70 and disabled all but 12 of the rest. When Pyrrhus landed, his army was attacked by more than 10,000 of the Mamertini who had crossed over to Italy before him. Two of his elephants fell, a great number of his rearguard were killed, and Pyrrhus himself was wounded yet again. One of the Mamertini challenged the wounded Pyrrhus to a duel if he was still up to it; enraged, Pyrrhus broke free of his 'shield-bearers' and supposedly cleaved the body of his enemy in two with a single blow. His army was not bothered further by the Mamertini during its march to Tarentum. On his return from Sicily Pyrrhus sent letters to, among others, Antigonos Gonatas, who had established himself as ruler of Macedonia following the death of Ptolemy Keraunos, asking for troops and money (Paus. 1. 13. 1), since he was desperately short of both.

During his absence in Sicily the Locrians had surrendered their city to a Roman garrison, but on learning that Pyrrhus was drawing near they rose up and slaughtered them. Pyrrhus put to death a number of leading citizens who had invited the Romans in, and imposed upon others stiff fines and the cost of supplying his army with rations. For treasure, Pyrrhus was persuaded to raid the Temple of Persephone in Locrian territory by 'the worst and most depraved of his friends' (Dion. 20. 9. 1). He arrived back at Tarentum with 20,000 foot and 3,000 cavalry; after adding the best troops of the Tarentines, he led them out against the Romans, who were encamped in Samnite territory (*P.* 24. 4).

The battle of Beneventum, 275 BC

The number of Roman citizens counted in the census of 275 BC was 271,224 – a fall of nearly 16,000 since 281. The newly appointed consul Manius Curius Dentatus had great difficulty in recruiting another consular army from the war-weary Romans, but the goods of any man caught avoiding the levy were

confiscated (Livy *Periocha* 13, 14). The new army marched out and encamped near the city of Maleventum ('Ill-come'); this inauspicious name would be changed to Beneventum ('Well-come') in 268 BC, when the town was granted Latin colony rights.



The famous 'Capena plate', now in the Villa Giulia Museum, Rome, is associated with the elephants brought to Italy in the army of Pyrrhus, 280–276 BC; see **Plate G**. They and their drivers came originally from India, and, being a valuable and prestigious military asset, they sometimes passed from one Hellenistic monarch to another – the animals which played a central part in Pyrrhus's victory over the Romans at Heraclea in 280 had previously been captured from Demetrius Poliorketes. (Photo Gaius Stern)

Pyrrhus divided his army in two, himself leading the first part against Dentatus while sending the other part into Lucania to prevent the army of Cornelius Lentulus from sending reinforcements to Dentatus. According to Orosius (4. 2. 6), Pyrrhus had 80,000 infantry and 6,000 cavalry, and Dionysius (20. 10) states that his forces outnumbered the Romans three to one – figures today regarded as greatly exaggerated. The accounts of the battle itself are also fragmentary, confused, and difficult to disentangle.

Pyrrhus tried to approach the Roman camp with part of his forces by a night march. The troops lost their way in the dark, and ended up in front of the Roman camp exhausted; the Romans reacted quickly, and attacked them. A young elephant was wounded and, shaking off its crew, wandered about in search of its

mother, disturbing the other elephants and throwing everything into confusion. The Romans killed many men and two elephants, and captured eight others when they hemmed them into a confined space, whereupon their Indian *mahouts* surrendered them (Zon. 8. 6; Dion. 20. 12. 3), presumably to save their beasts' lives. A Roman attack on Pyrrhus's main force was repulsed and they were compelled to withdraw behind the defences of their camp, but ultimately they were victorious. Pyrrhus's army was dispersed, and his camp, with all its treasure, was captured; Pyrrhus made his escape to Tarentum accompanied by only a few horsemen (Zon. 8. 6).

Eutropius (2. 13) says that 23,000 of Pyrrhus's soldiers were killed, and Orosius (4.2. 6) puts the figure at 33,000. Four of the elephants captured by Dentatus's troops (Eutropius 2. 13) were paraded in his triumph at Rome in February 274, as well as Molossian, Thessalian, Macedonian, Bruttian, Apulian and Lucanian prisoners (Florus 1. 13. 27).

Note

3 'Galatians' was the term later used by Greeks for Gallic Celtic peoples who penetrated the Balkans in the 4th century BC and Asia Minor in the 3rd century, settling in what is now northern and central Anatolia, Turkey. This is the 'Galatia' that would become a Roman province in 25 BC.

RETURN TO EPIRUS, 274 BC

Pyrrhus sailed to Epirus at the end of 274, taking with him only 8,000 infantry and 500 cavalry; he expected to return to Italy soon (*P.* 26. 2). He left behind in Tarentum a garrison under his youngest son Helenus, and his trusted general Milon (Justin 25. 3. 4).

As noted above, during his absence Macedonia and much Greek territory had been overrun in 279 BC by a Gallic horde, who defeated and killed Ptolemy Keraunos. Among the leaders of the resistance was Antigonos Gonatas, son of Demetrius Poliokretes, who took back the throne of Macedonia after winning victories over the Gauls in 278 and 277.

Short of money, Pyrrhus now raided Macedonia with some Gauls who had entered his service, ‘designing to strip and plunder the country’ (*P.* 26. 3). After he took a number of cities, and 2,000 Macedonian soldiers came over to his side, he began to hope for greater things. Edessa was taken for Pyrrhus by one of his generals, Cleonymus of Sparta. When he attacked the army of Antigonos in a narrow pass only the Gallic mercenaries who formed the Macedonian rearguard put up a fight, and the elephant crews surrendered. Pyrrhus advanced on the phalanx of the Macedonians, stretching out his right hand and calling out to their generals (*stratēgoi*) and colonels (*taxiarchoi*), and all the infantry went over to him. Antigonos Gonatas fled in disguise with a few of his cavalry. Along with most of Macedonia, Pyrrhus also took Thessaly, but Antigonos Gonatas still held the Macedonian coastal cities as well as a number in central Greece and the Peloponnese, including Corinth.

With a hired army of Gauls, Antigonos fell upon Ptolemy, the son of Pyrrhus, in Epirus, but was again defeated, and supposedly escaped with only seven followers. Pyrrhus dedicated shields and other booty taken from the Gauls at the shrine of Athena Itonis in Thessaly. He also dedicated at Dodona a set of shields taken from the Macedonians themselves, inscribed thus (Paus. 1.13.3):

*The shields displayed here
Which once overran the gold-bearing soil of Asia
Brought slavery to Greece as well.
Today on the columns of the Temple of Zeus
They are fatherless
Spoils taken from arrogant Macedonia.*

Failure at Sparta, 272 BC

It was at this point, according to Justin (25. 4. 1), that Pyrrhus began to contemplate the subjection of both Greece and Asia to reconstitute the empire of Alexander. Feeling that the acquisition of Macedonia had made up for the loss of Sicily and Italy, he summoned Helenus and Milon from Tarentum with the larger part of his forces (Justin 25. 3. 6); Helenus rejoined his father, but Milon stayed behind in Tarentum. In order to bring the whole of Greece under his control, Pyrrhus first had to dislodge Antigonos Gonatas from the cities he still held.

Taking his sons Ptolemy and Helenus, Pyrrhus crossed over into the Peloponnese, probably from Aetolia across the Straits of Rhion, with an army of 25,000 foot, 2,000 horse and 24 elephants (*P.* 26. 9 – most of these elephants had presumably been captured from Antigonos Gonatas in 274, but a number may have returned from Italy with Helenus). Pyrrhus proclaimed that he had come to free the cities subject to Antigonos, and he was greeted enthusiastically.

At Megalopolis he was met by an embassy sent by the Lakedaimonians (Spartans), whom he sought to reassure. In fact, his entourage included Cleonymus of Sparta, a son of King Cleomenes II, who had been excluded from the throne on his father's death in 309 BC due to the dislike inspired by his violent temper. (We first hear of Cleonymus in the service of Pyrrhus in 274 BC when he captured the Macedonian city of Edessa, but he may have entered his service much earlier.) Sparta was officially a dual monarchy, but the other king, Areus, was now ruling alone, and Cleonymus asked Pyrrhus to restore him to his throne.

Pyrrhus marched against Sparta and took the capital city completely by surprise. King Areus was campaigning in Crete, and Pyrrhus, thinking that the city would be undefended, camped outside it for the night. During the hours of darkness the Spartans made a massive effort to build improvised fortifications, mobilizing the women and old men so that the warriors could rest; they sank a deep trench opposite the enemy camp, and dug-in lines of wagons, axle deep, at each end.

Pyrrhus's eldest son Ptolemy, with 2,000 Gauls and picked Chaonians, tried unsuccessfully to dig out the wagons. On the second day the Macedonian troops tried to fill the trench in (*P.* 29. 3), and Pyrrhus succeeded in riding through the wagons, but was thrown from his horse when it was wounded by a Cretan arrow, and was only rescued with difficulty by his 'companions'. Reinforcements reached the city: mercenaries led by Ameinas the Phocian, one of Antigonos Gonatas's generals, and King Areus with 2,000 troops from Crete.

Death in Argos

In the city of Argos, one political party was led by Aristippus and another by Aristetas; Antigonos Gonatas supported Aristippus, so Aristetas invited Pyrrhus to intervene. Turning to this new objective, Pyrrhus set out for Argos, but his army was harried all the way by Areus, who set frequent ambushes at the most difficult points on the route of march. He kept cutting off the Gallic and Molossian rearguard, and Pyrrhus ordered Ptolemy to take the 'companions' and ride to their rescue. Ptolemy was killed, reportedly by a Cretan named Oryssos of Aptera who was fighting with a formation of Lakedaimonian 'picked troops' under the command of Eualkos (*P.* 30. 4). Pyrrhus attacked the Lakedaimonians at the head of the Molossian cavalry, and slew Eualkos personally. Pyrrhus pitched his camp at Nauplia and sent a herald to Antigonos Gonatas, challenging him to fight for his kingdom in single combat, but Antigonos declined.



The basic helmet shape from the Locrian *diadrachm* passed on to appear, if rather crudely, on Roman coinage. The last example is the head of Mars shown on this gold piece worth 60 asses (as denoted by the archaic numerals for 50 and 10) struck in 209 BC. The reverse shows the triumphant eagle of Rome seated on a thunderbolt. (National Museum, Warsaw, 107006 MNW; photos Piotr Ligier)

Pyrrhus entered Argos at night by a gate which Aristetas had left open. His Gauls were first through and occupied the marketplace, but the operation was then delayed when the elephants' 'towers' proved to be too tall for the gate, and had to be taken off outside and replaced once inside the city. The alarm was raised, and the Argives summoned help. Antigonos Gonatas sent his own son Alkyoneus into the city, and Areus also arrived with 1,000 Cretans and a force of lightly-armed Spartiates, who fell upon the Gauls. Pyrrhus entered the city as day began to break and ordered a retreat, but the gate was blocked by a wounded elephant.

The driver of another elephant named Nikon fell from its neck mortally wounded. Nikon turned back against the retreating crowd of troops to search for his master, and when he found the body 'he took it up with his trunk, laid it across his tusks, and turned back as if crazed, over-throwing and killing those who came in his way' (*P.* 33. 4). Helenus, misunderstanding the situation, attempted to bring help in the form of the rest of the elephants and the best of the troops, but this only added to the general confusion.

Pursued by the enemy, Pyrrhus removed the diadem that distinguished his helmet and gave it to one of his companions (*P.* 34. 1). Plunging into the enemy ranks, Pyrrhus was wounded by an Argive with a spear which pierced his cuirass. When he turned on the Argive the defender's mother, who was watching her son from a rooftop, threw a heavy tile down at Pyrrhus and hit him on the neck. Stunned, the king fell from his horse; before he could recover himself, one of Antigonos's soldiers named Zopyros hacked off his head with repeated blows from an Illyrian sword.

Aftermath

Shocked by such barbarity towards a great king, Antigonos Gonatas had Pyrrhus cremated in the middle of the marketplace, and a monument of white marble was built on the site of the pyre, carved in relief with elephants and his other instruments of war (*Paus.* 2. 21. 4).

Antigonos was now able to reunite Macedonia. He made himself master of Pyrrhus's now leaderless army, including its Macedonian contingent, and dealt mildly with the 'friends' of Pyrrhus (*P.* 34. 6), sending Helenus back to Epirus. The death of Pyrrhus made the presence of the Epirote garrison at Tarentum untenable; the Tarentines started to launch attacks on Milon, and sent envoys to Rome. Finding himself fighting the Tarentines and Romans on land and the Carthaginians at sea, Milon entered negotiations with the Roman consul Papirius Cursor. He obtained liberal terms for the Epirotes: he and his men were able to hand over the unguarded city to the Romans, and were allowed to depart complete with their military chest. The Tarentines had to hand over their arms and ships to the Romans, demolish their walls, and agree to pay tribute (*Frontin. Strat.* 3. 3. 1; *Zonaras* 8. 6).

Downfall of the Aeakid dynasty

The oldest surviving son of Pyrrhus became king in 272 BC as Alexander II. He invaded Macedonia during the Chremonidean War in about 262/261, but was routed and deposed by Antigonos Gonatas. Soon restored to his kingdom with Aetolian help, he divided Acarnania with the Aetolians in about 243. When he

died perhaps three years later, in his mid-fifties, he was succeeded by his widow Olympias acting as regent for his young sons, Pyrrhus and Ptolemy.

Pyrrhus II became king, and when he died young he was succeeded by Ptolemy. The Aetolians tried to seize the Epirote half of Arcanania, and devastated the border regions; Ptolemy II died in around 234 while on campaign, and his mother Olympias died from grief. Pyrrhus II's daughter Deidameia occupied Ambracia, seeking acceptance as the ruler of the Epirotes, but she was murdered while seeking sanctuary in the temple of Artemis Hegemone.



Fragment of a bronze *peltē* shield from Mycenae, now in Nafplion Museum. Found in 1965 at the site of a temple of Enyalios (a war-god) north of the acropolis, it bears the following incompletely restored inscription: 'THE ARGIVES TO THE GODS FROM K[ING] / PYRRHU[S]'. According to Pausanias (2. 21. 4), a bronze shield of Pyrrhus was hung over the door at the entrance to the Sanctuary of Demeter at Argos. The excavator proposed that booty taken from Pyrrhus's army in 272 BC was distributed among various sanctuaries throughout Argive territory. (Photo Richard Evers)

THE ARMY OF PYRRHUS

Almost all that we know about the army is derived from two sources: Plutarch's *Life of Pyrrhus*, and books 19 and 20 of the *Roman Antiquities* of Dionysius of Halicarnassus.

Pyrrhus's army is best characterized as being 'early Hellenistic'. Like other Successor armies it showed many features in common with that of Alexander the Great, but these were already starting to evolve. Unlike other Successor armies, it did not emerge from the disintegration of the Alexandrine Macedonian army; the Molossian (and Epirote) army was already a distinct entity by the second half of the 4th century. Additionally, the army of Pyrrhus contained many non-Epirote units, though in many cases it is not possible to determine if these units were mercenaries or allied contingents.

In the southern Balkans the process of state-building developed in parallel in the kingdoms of Molossia and Macedonia, a process which was reinforced by frequent intermarriage between the two royal houses. Consequently, many institutions of the Macedonian court and army found their parallels in Epirus. In order to understand how the army was commanded and controlled, we first have to address the institutions of the court.

The Molossian court

The title of 'friend' (*philos*) was common in Hellenistic courts, and was held by perhaps a dozen or so individuals. The king's 'friends' participated in court ceremonial, accompanied him when he travelled (*P.* 5. 3, 15. 4), fought at his side in the *basilikon agēma* (*P.* 16. 10), and could be called upon for advice (*Diod.* 22. 10. 3, 6). In return they could expect to receive lands from the king, as they did in Sicily (*Dion.* 20. 8. 1).

Strabo (7. 7. 8) tells us that the Epirotes had similar language, hairstyles and cloaks to the Macedonians. We read that Eumenes of Cardia distributed sea-purple *kausia* caps and *chlamydes* cloaks to the thousand men appointed to be his bodyguard (*doryphoroi*), and that they were delighted to receive gifts that monarchs normally gave to their 'friends' (*Plut. Eumenes* 8. 7). A sea-purple *kausia* and cloak may thus have been the insignia of a 'friend' at the Molossian court.

Another court title was 'companion' (*hetairos*), of whom there might have been a hundred or so. In *P.* 34. 1, Pyrrhus orders his son Ptolemy to take his 'companions' to the rescue of the Molossian rearguard during his advance to

Argos. During his independent rule at home in Pyrrhus's absence Ptolemy had instituted his own court and assembled his own 'companions'. Presumably the words of Plutarch should be understood to mean that Ptolemy took with him a small band of his personal entourage, rather than implying the existence of an actual 'companion cavalry regiment' within the Epirote army. Megacles, 'the most faithful of his [Pyrrhus's] companions' (Dion. 19. 12. 6; *P.* 17.1), fought in the 'royal squadron' (*basilikē ilē*) at the battle of Heraclea. The title *hetairos* appears again in Plutarch, during Pyrrhus's attack on Sparta (*P.* 29. 5) and death in Argos (*P.* 34. 1). Leonnatos, son of Leophantos the Macedonian, is described as *tōn meta tou basileōs*, 'one of those about the king' (Dion. 19. 12. 2), which is perhaps another court title.

Another Macedonian institution duplicated in the Epirote court was the 'royal pages' (*basilikoi paides*). The Macedonian organization was first institutionalized under Philip II, but might have a much earlier history. In the events leading up to the death of Alexander I of Epirus in Italy, we are told that one Sotimus was his *minister ex regis pueri* (Livy 8. 24. 12), and in Latin *regis pueri* means *basilikoi paides*. As Alexander I had probably served in the Macedonian *basilikoi paides*, it is likely that he founded the same institution in Molossia.

The major officials of the court and army were selected from among the king's 'friends' and 'companions', and one important court post was that of cup-bearer (*oinochoos*), literally 'wine-pourer'. From the account of a plot to poison Pyrrhus in the first year of his reign, it seems there was one 'chief cup-bearer' (*archioinochoos*) plus a number of subordinates (*P.* 5. 3–4). In one version of the plot to assassinate Pyrrhus after Asculum, the Roman consul Fabricius is approached by Timochares of Ambracia, one of the king's 'friends', offering to poison Pyrrhus through his son, who was the king's cup-bearer (Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 3. 8; Val. Max. 6. 5. 1d). As in the Macedonian court, it is likely that the cup-bearers were selected from the royal pages.

Command and staff

The 'spear-bearers' (*doryphoroi*), a title ultimately derived from Persian practice, guaranteed the personal protection of the sovereign (*P.* 15. 4).

As in most Hellenistic armies, those literally called 'bodyguards' (*sōmatophylakes*) were not, in fact, a personal escort, but a small number of staff officers responsible for the administration of the army at the highest level. In Alexander the Great's army they numbered seven, later expanded to eight. At the battle of Heraclea, Pyrrhus made his escape on a horse which belonged to the most faithful man among these 'bodyguards' (Dion. 19. 12. 5); he is not named,

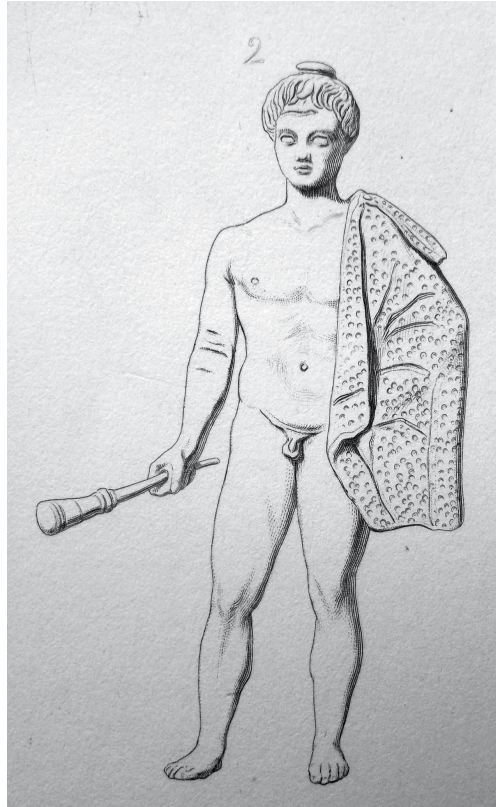
but was also fighting in the ranks of the ‘royal squadron’. We also hear of Nestor (Polyaenus 8. 52), a ‘bodyguard’ of Alexander II, son of Pyrrhus, so the institution lasted until the end of the dynasty.



This bronze figurine, purchased after World War II and now in Athens (EM 16727), is almost certainly from Dodona. It shows a general sacrificing before battle, holding in his hand the sacrificed animal's liver used for divination (see **Plate B1**). He wears what is clearly an Etruscan cuirass, perhaps acquired on an expedition to the west, such as that made by Alexander I of Epirus in the 320s BC. (Author's photos)

In Alexander the Great's army the *hypaspistai* or ‘shield-bearers’ were originally an elite regiment of infantry, but the term later came to be applied to a lower grade of staff officer, who carried out the orders of the *sōmatophylakes*. In Sicily, Pyrrhus assigned the chief magistracies in the cities to his own *hypaspistai* (Dion. 20. 8. 1), who seem to be officers of this type. If not on detached duties, the *hypaspistai* would normally be about the person of the king. Plutarch (P. 24. 3) tells us that Pyrrhus had to force his way through his *hypaspistai* to fight a duel with a Mamertine warrior. One imagines that there would have been fewer than ten ‘bodyguards’, but perhaps a few dozen ‘shield-bearers’.

In preparation for a campaign these staff officers, in conjunction with the managers of the royal household, would be responsible for amassing the necessary supplies to meet the needs of the army. Pliny (*NH* 18. 73. 307) noted that Varro recorded that ‘beans stored in a cavern in Ambracia lasted from the period of King Pyrrhus to Pompey the Great’s war against the pirates, a period of about 220 years’. These stores were probably amassed for the campaign in Asia that Pyrrhus was planning when he died.



Drawing of a bronze statuette from Dodona now in Athens (EM Car. 13), showing a young man, possibly a ‘royal page’, wearing a short *chlamys* cloak; see **Plate B2**. (After Carapanos 1878, pl. XIV, 2)

CAVALRY

Pyrrhus sailed to Italy with 3,000 cavalry (*P.* 15. 1). Shortly after landing, and despite his losses at sea, he took the field at Heraclea with only his own forces, including 3,000 cavalry. It seems that no Tarentine cavalry fought at Heraclea, only infantry; it takes far more time to train cavalry than it does infantry, and Pyrrhus may have judged the Tarentine cavalry as not yet ready for deployment.

Greek cavalry is thought to have adopted shields during the 270s. During the fight between Eualkes and Pyrrhus outside Argos in 272, following the death of

Pyrrhus's son Ptolemy, Eualkes almost cut off the king's bridle-hand with his sword, and did sever the rein (*P.* 30. 6). This implies that Pyrrhus, at least, was not carrying a shield. He is mentioned as wearing spurs (*Dion.* 20. 3. 3); these had been in general use since the middle of the 4th century.

Guard cavalry

At Asculum, Pyrrhus surrounded himself with the so-called *basilikon agēma* of chosen (*epilektoi*) cavalry, 'about 2,000 in number' (*Dion.* 20. 1. 4), stationed 'outside the battle-line, so as to aid promptly any of his troops in turn that might be hard pressed'. *Agēma*, meaning 'leading' or 'vanguard', is a regimental title that goes back to Alexander the Great's day. All the armies of the Successors were influenced by Alexander's organization of the Macedonian army, and the Epirote army was no exception. These will be 'the cavalry of the Molossians' (*P.* 30. 5) that Pyrrhus leads in the march from Sparta to Argos in 272, although it is unlikely that they accounted for all of the 2,000 cavalry that started the invasion of the Peloponnese (*P.* 26. 9).

This regiment was divided into squadrons (*ilai*). At Heraclea in 280, Pyrrhus fought within the ranks of the *basilikē ilē*, or 'royal squadron' (*Dion.* 19. 12. 3), an elite within an elite. This 'royal squadron' included officers of the staff and court not holding independent commands elsewhere. One of them, Leonnatos, son of Leophantos the Macedonian, was the first to warn Pyrrhus about the suspicious moves of Oblacus Volsinus (*Dion.* 19. 12. 2), who, with some comrades, charged into the midst of the royal squadron and attacked the king. Grasping his spear (*dory*) with both hands, Leonnatos struck the horse of Oblacus, but not before the latter had killed the king's horse. Pyrrhus then exchanged his clothing and armour with the unfortunate Megacles (see **Plate D**).

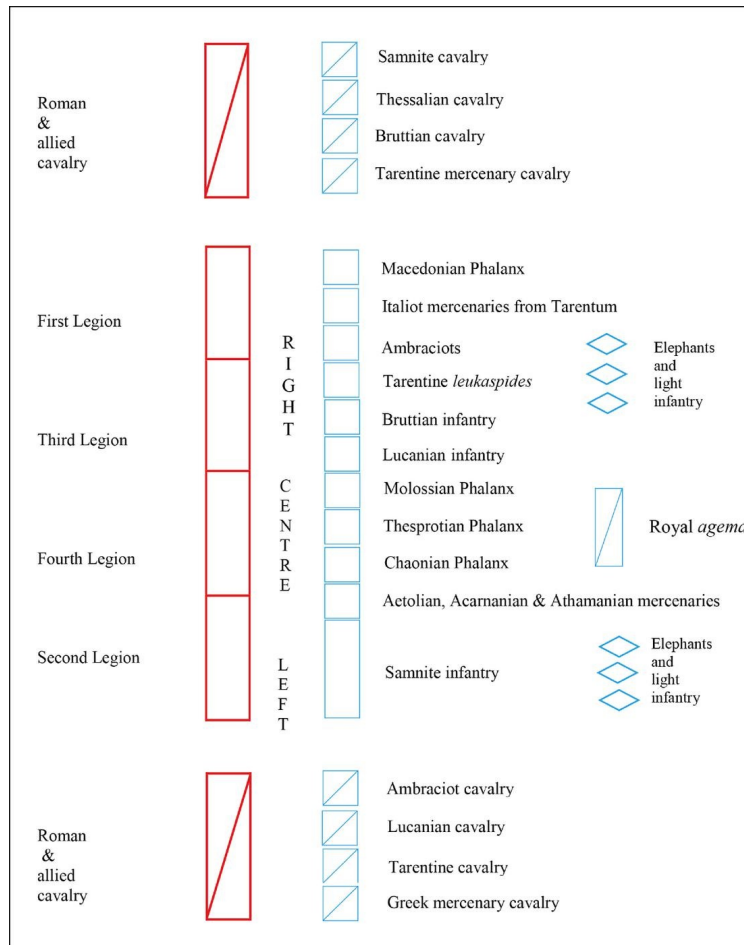


Diagram of the Roman and Pyrrhic battle lines at Asculum, 279 BC, drawn according to the description by Dionysius of Halicarnassus (20, 1. 1–7). This is a crucially important source for the composition of Pyrrhus's army, even though Dionysius does not go into any detail about the strengths of these units, nor the ways in which they were recruited, organized or armed. (Andrew Sekunda)

In Alexander's army each *ilē* had numbered 200, although we hear of *ilai* which are 300 or more in strength in the armies of the Successors. Although no source gives the strength of the *ilai* in the army of Pyrrhus, we would expect a similar number, although the royal *basilikē ilē* may have been double-strength. The *ilē* was itself divided into sub-units; Dionysius (20. 3. 1) tells us that at the battle of Asculum, Pyrrhus sent a 'part of the squadron around him' (i.e. of the *basilikē ilē*) to another area of the battlefield where the line was collapsing.

The horses of the *basilikon agēma* must have been impressive mounts. According to Aristotle (*Historia Animalum* 3. 21), in Epirus almost all quadrupeds (although, curiously, excluding asses) were of large size. Epirote horses are favourably mentioned in Virgil's *Georgica*, in two places (1.5 9; 3.

121), the first of these passages celebrating Olympian prizes won by Epirote mares.



Two Tarentine coins probably struck during Pyrrhus's rule in the city. They both show helmeted horsemen armed with javelins, carrying round shields with different blazons (see **Plate F**). The device of the eight-rayed star is associated with monarchy, and the dolphin with the port city of Tarentum. (Drawings by Natalia Kozłowska)

Line cavalry

If the Molossian *basilikē agēma* or Guard cavalry numbered 2,000, this apparently leaves only 1,000 to divide up among the three line regiments. The cavalry of the line was also organized into *ilai* (Dion. 20. 3. 6) which – as in the *basilikē ilē* – could be further divided into sub-units of unknown name. If they only totalled 1,000 riders, it is difficult to see how the three line regiments could field more than one squadron each.

Line cavalry were either allied contingents or units of mercenaries. At the battle of Asculum, Dionysius (20. 1. 3) tells us of the cavalry that Pyrrhus ‘stationed the Samnite, Thessalian and Bruttian horse and the Tarentine mercenary force upon the right wing, and the Ambraciot, Lucanian and Tarentine horse, and the Greek mercenary force – consisting of Acarnanians, Aetolians, Macedonians and Athamanians – on the left’. This clearly differentiates between mercenary units (the Tarentine and the Greek mercenary forces) and allied contingents – the rest.

Ambraciot cavalry

That the Ambraciots would have supplied an allied cavalry contingent comes as no surprise. Ambracia was the richest of the territorial acquisitions Pyrrhus had made in 295 BC, and during his reign its city was developed as his capital. Formally Ambracia would have been in alliance with Epirus. Ambraciot cavalry are attested serving the Aeakid royal house somewhat earlier. In 317 Olympias,

the mother of Alexander the Great, marched against Cassander with the support of Aeakides, father of Pyrrhus, but was besieged in Pydna. Diodorus (19. 35. 7) reports that she had about her some of the Ambracian horse, and most of the soldiers who were accustomed to ‘serve about the court’ (*peri tēn aulēn*).

Thessalian cavalry

The presence of the second allied contingent mentioned by Dionysius, the Thessalian horse, is more surprising. Pyrrhus had lost Thessaly to Lysimachus in 284 BC, but perhaps he reoccupied it after the defeat of Lysimachus at Korupedion. Conversely, they might be a component of the 4,000 cavalry which Justin (17. 2. 14) says were supplied to Pyrrhus by Ptolemy Keraunos. The Thessalian horse are also mentioned at the battle of Heraclea by Plutarch (*P.* 17. 3), and Thessalian prisoners are mentioned in the triumph celebrated by M. Curius Dentatus after Beneventum (Florus 1. 13. 27).

Mercenary cavalry

Ptolemy Keraunos would have allowed Pyrrhus to recruit mercenary cavalry in Macedonia. Acarnania and Athamania were both under the direct rule of Pyrrhus, so he would be free to recruit there, and the Aetolians were long-standing allies. Strabo (8. 8. 1) comments on the ‘deserted’ areas of the Aetolians and Acarnanians, which he asserts are no less well adapted to horse-raising than Thessaly.

Italian allied cavalry

At Asculum, Pyrrhus had ‘slightly more’ than 8,000 cavalry (Dion. 20. 1. 8). If we subtract 3,000 for his own units, this leaves at least 5,000 allied cavalry. Of the allied horse, he stationed the Samnites, Bruttians, and the Tarentine mercenary force (*misthophoron*) upon the right wing (20. 1. 3). This implies that the Samnite and Bruttian horse were both levied citizen forces. On the left wing he placed the Lucanian and Tarentine citizen cavalry. So, in all, his Italian allies provided five regiments: perhaps each numbering 1,000? On the other hand, we know that earlier on the Tarentines alone had been capable of fielding 3,000 cavalry (Strabo 6. 3. 4).

INFANTRY

Officers called *lochagoi* are attested in Pyrrhus’s service (Dion. 20. 8. 1). In later Hellenistic practice the word *lochos* changed to mean ‘file’, and *lochagoi* were simply file-leaders, but in Pyrrhus’s day they still seem to be more senior

officers, so his infantry seems to have been organized into *lochoi* or ‘companies’. In Alexander’s time the infantry *lochos* had a strength of 512 – in 32 files of 16 men – so this was probably still the case in full-strength units of Pyrrhus’s army.

Only 16,000 of the 25,500 soldiers who crossed the Ionian Sea to Italy in 281/280 BC remained to participate in the battle of Asculum about a year later (Dion. 20. 1. 8). The total would have included some of the 500 slingers, 3,000 archers and 3,000 cavalry, but that leaves perhaps 12,000 line infantrymen. If these are divided between the six Epirote and allied Greek infantry regiments of Pyrrhus’s battle-line at Asculum, it gives a rough-and-ready figure of perhaps 2,000 per regiment by that stage of the campaign.



This helmet of the ‘Phrygian’ type, now in Ioannina Museum, is dated to the mid-4th century BC; it came from Vitsa (Vokotopoulou, 1982), to the north of the Molossian capital Passaron. It appears to have a fastening for a crest at the front of the forward-curved apex, and tubes for attaching feathers or other plumes low on each side. (Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports, Ephorate of Antiquities of Ioannina)

The Macedonian phalanx

Ptolemy Keraunos supplied Pyrrhus for his Italian campaign with 5,000 infantry (Justin 17. 2. 14), presumably volunteer mercenaries. Pyrrhus gave the Macedonian phalanx ‘the first place on the right wing’, where they ‘distinguished themselves for valour’ (Dion. 20. 1. 1, 2. 4). Macedonian prisoners taken at Beneventum were displayed by M. Curius Dentatus in his

triumph (Florus 1. 13. 27). In 274 the Macedonian phalanx came over to Pyrrhus (P. 26. 3) in time to participate in his last campaign against Antigonos Gonatas (P. 29. 3).

The Thesprotian, Chaonian and Molossian phalanxes

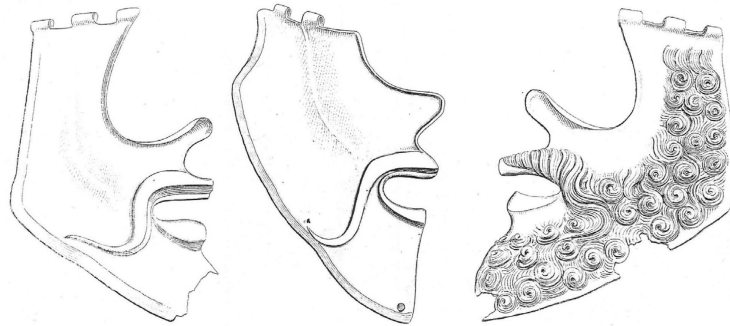
The three Epirote phalanxes were formed of levied troops. Plutarch (*Mor.* 969C-D) has preserved an anecdote about Pyrrhus which implies that Epirote soldiers were subject to some form of periodic royal inspection at the places in which they would normally muster.

At Asculum, Dionysius mentions that the centre of Pyrrhus' line was formed by three separate phalanxes of Thesprotians, Chaonians and Molossians (20. 1. 2, 5). 'Chaonians and Molossians' are mentioned in a military context by Plutarch (P. 19. 2), and Molossians are also mentioned among the prisoners lost to the Romans at Beneventum. These Thesprotian, Chaonian and Molossian contingents were presumably trained on the lines of the Macedonian phalanx, and used long pikes (*sarisai*) and full-sized Macedonian shields, measuring 'nine palms' (72–75cm/ 28½–29½in) in diameter and strongly convex in profile. It was in the reign of Pyrrhus that the *sarisa* achieved its greatest length. When Edessa was captured in 274 the Macedonian defenders were carrying *sarisai* 16 cubits long (8m/ 26ft). Pyrrhus's senior officer Cleonymus of Sparta took the *sarisai* from the first two ranks of his phalanx and commanded them to catch the *sarisai* of the Macedonians (Polyaenus *Strat.* 2. 29. 2); this implies that the Epirote phalanx was using shorter *sarisai*, being 'outranged' by those of the Macedonians.

Epirote *logades*

In operations against Sparta in 272, Plutarch (P. 28. 1) draws a strong contrast between Pyrrhus with his force of hoplites, and 'his son Ptolemy with 2,000 Gauls and the Chaonian *logades* [picked troops]', thus implying that these Chaonian *logades* were more lightly equipped than the hoplites (phalangites) with Pyrrhus. The *logades* were probably equipped as Hellenistic *peltastai*. In the Hellenistic period that term comes to be applied not to javelin-throwers carrying light leather or wooden *peltai*, but to troops who, while more mobile than fully-armoured heavy infantry hoplites, could also fight in phalanx formation equipped with a pike and bronze *peltē*. Their almost flat bronze *peltai* measured about 'eight palms' (68cm/ 26–27in) in diameter, in contrast to the larger 'Macedonian' bronze shields of the hoplites. If each of the three Epirote

phalanx regiments numbered 3,000 on departure, divided into six *lochoi*, it is possible that one *lochos* consisted of *logades*.



Carapanos recovered three bronze hinged cheek-pieces from 'Phrygian' helmets, now in the National Archaeological Museum, Athens. Note in these drawings the slightly differing shapes around the eyes. The first two cover the right cheek, each with a stylized embossed 'moustache', the central example also having a raised 'cheekbone' (Car. 161, 162). The more elaborate third example, for the left cheek (Car. 163), has a detailed moustache and curly beard. (After Carapanos 1878, pl. LV 1, 4, 2)

Later, when Pyrrhus withdrew from Sparta in 272, the Spartan King Areus set frequent ambushes at the most difficult points on the route of march, thus cutting off the Gauls and the Molossians 'guarding the rear' (*P.* 30. 2). These Molossians too were thus probably *logades* (Hammond 1967, 568). If they were stationed in the rearguard of Pyrrhus' army, then the war-booty bronze *peltē* found at Mycenae (see [here](#)) could have been taken during this fighting; the excavator estimated its original diameter at around 70cm (27½in).

The Ambraciot phalanx

Fighting on the right of the infantry line at Asculum were the Macedonian phalanx; then the Italiote mercenaries (*misthophoroi*) from Tarentum; and then 'those from Ambracia' (Dion. 20. 1. 2). If we interpret this passage strictly the Ambraciots should be mercenaries too, but this is not certain. It seems preferable to believe that they were an allied contingent, as the Ambraciot cavalry probably were. Dionysius (20. 1. 4) later on describes these same troops as being an 'Ambraciot phalanx'.



This sculpture, recorded on the art market in Basle, Switzerland in 1972, is the only representation of a *thureophoros* warrior known to come from Tarentum; compare with **Plate F3**. Lacking the head and upwards-bending right arm, it shows the contorted front view of a torso and upper legs; the distinctive *thureos* shield, with a broad sabre-blade superimposed; the protective bronze-faced Samnite belt, over a short tunic hitched up at each side; and the scabbard. (Drawing by Natalia Kozłowska after Carter 1975, pl. 64)

The mercenary phalanx

Fighting on the left at Asculum were the Aetolian, Acarnanian and Athamanian mercenaries (*misthophoroi*), and then finally the Samnites (Dion. 20. 1. 2). Later in the battle Pyrrhus sent 'from the phalanx the Athamanians and the Acarnanians, and some of the Samnites' to another part of the line that was in danger (20. 3. 6). So this confirms that these troops were phalangites, and, unless Dionysius has made a slip, that their formation was composed of three distinct ethnic sub-units (each consisting of 1,000 men?). In parallel, the Acarnanians, Aetolians and Athamanians also supplied contingents of mercenary cavalry to the army (20. 1. 3), as did the Macedonians.

Italian allied infantry

In the right wing at Asculum, between the Macedonian and the Ambraciot phalanxes, Pyrrhus placed the Italiote mercenaries (*misthophoroi*) from Tarentum (20. 1. 1, 4). On the left of the Ambraciot phalanx, between it and the Epirote phalanxes in the centre, came the 'white shield' (*leukaspides*) phalanx of the Tarentines, followed by the allied force (*symmachikon*) of Bruttians and Lucanians (20.1. 2, 4). There were no Italian allied infantry in the centre, but the Samnite *thureophoros* phalanx constituted almost the entire left wing (20. 1. 2, 5, 6). The majority of these allied forces are likely to have been *thureophoroi*. I

have argued elsewhere (Sekunda 2013, 108–113) that the formula ‘*leukaspides phalanx*’ is used as a synonym for *thureophoroi*.

A fragment of Dionysius (20. 11. 1), apparently describing the march on the Roman camp prior to the battle of Beneventum, mentions at one point the hoplites of Pyrrhus’ army burdened with helmets, cuirasses and ‘heavy *thureoi*.’ By this time the majority of Pyrrhus’s army would have been Italian, and these *thureophoroi* are heavily equipped with cuirasses.

According to Polybius (18. 28. 10), Pyrrhus ‘made use not only of Italian arms but Italian forces, placing a maniple (*sēmeia*) of these and a phalanx battalion (*speira*) in alternate order in his battles with the Romans’. This implies that Epirote forces were equipped as phalangites, and the Italians were formed up and equipped in the Roman fashion, carrying the Roman *scutum* – in Greek, *thureos*. The maniples of Italians would have served as flexible ‘joints’ between the pike-blocks, enabling the latter to deliver a series of individual hammer-blows without disrupting the line. In this way the phalanx could ‘articulate’, and a rupture in the line was prevented; I have elsewhere called this formation an ‘articulating phalanx’ (Sekunda 2006, 118).



An Athenian relief depicting a noble-looking stallion, now in the New Acropolis Museum (MA 1349). The inscription (*IG ii² 101*) records the awarding of a crown in 373/372 BC to ‘Alketas son of Leptines, a Syracusan’ – that is, the adopted Alketas I of Molossia – presumably for a victory in a horse race in the Panathenaic Games that year. This may therefore be the only surviving image of one of the large Epirote horses that were famous in antiquity. (Photo Dawid Borowka)

ELEPHANTS & MISSILE TROOPS

The forces Pyrrhus took to Italy in 280 BC included 20 elephants, 500 slingers, and 3,000 archers (*P.* 15. 1). If it was Pyrrhus's intention to disperse the slingers and archers between the elephants, continuing the standard practice of Successor armies, this gives us 25 slingers and 150 archers per beast. The Tarentines are also stated to have possessed forces of slingers and archers in fighting that took place before Pyrrhus arrived (Zon. 8. 2).

At the battle of Paraitacene in 317, Eumenes of Cardia drew up 45 of his elephants on his left wing and placed an 'appropriate number' of archers and slingers in the spaces between the animals (Diod. 19. 27. 5). At the battle of Gaza in 312, Demetrius stationed 30 of his elephants on his left wing and filled the intervals between them with units of light-armed troops, consisting of 1,000 archers and javelin-men and 500 Persian slingers (Diod. 19. 82. 3); this works out at 50 missile troops for each elephant. Much later on, at the battle of Panion in 200 BC, Antiochus III placed his elephants in the centre, 'the spaces between [them] being filled with bowmen and slingers' (Polyb. 16. 18. 7).

Pyrrhus used missile troops to great effect in conjunction with elephants. At Asculum, he divided his *psiloi* (light infantry) and his elephants into two groups, placing them behind both wings at a reasonable distance, in a position slightly elevated above the plain (Dion. 20. 1. 3). Later during the battle Pyrrhus 'ordered that the elephants be led to that part of the line that was in difficulty' (Dion. 20. 2. 4). In the final phases of the battle the Roman 3rd and 4th Legions, after routing the troops drawn up opposite them, took refuge upon a thickly wooded hilltop and awaited their enemies in battle formation. Pyrrhus sent against them 'the boldest of his horse' and the elephant and *psiloi* combination. The elephants and the cavalry could not advance up the wooded slope, but 'the bowmen and the slingers, hurling their missiles from all sides, wounded and destroyed many of them' (20. 3. 6). The Roman infantry could not break their ranks and charge down the slope to disperse these missile troops because of the potential threat posed by the elephants and cavalry.

Elephants

Of the 20 elephants which crossed the Ionian Sea, only 19 took part in the battle of Asculum (Dion. 20. 1. 8). These would have been Indian – African elephants were used only later – and their drivers are called 'Indian' at Beneventum (Dion. 20. 12. 3). Most had been captured from Demetrius in 288. Pyrrhus returned to Epirus with no elephants, but his son Helenus may have brought some back. When he invaded the Peloponnese his army included 24 elephants (*P.* 26. 9), most having been acquired from the army of Antigonos Gonatas the previous year (*P.* 26. 3).

In fighting between elephants at the battle of Raphia in 217 BC, the crews are equipped with *sarisai* for use against enemy crews in the ‘towers’ opposite (Polyb. 5. 84. 2), but this may be a later development. The texts make no mention of *sarisai*, and only javelins are shown on the ‘Capena plate’. At Asculum, crews in the towers hurled throwing-spears (*lonchai*) at the enemy below (Dion. 20. 2. 5), while at Heraclea Roman infantry were killed by the crews in the towers, and by the elephants themselves with their trunks and tusks, or trampled underfoot (Zon. 8.3). Scullard (1974, 105) thinks that Pyrrhus himself or one of his staff may actually have been responsible for the invention of elephant-towers.

Slingers

Pyrrhus presumably recruited his slingers from Acarnania; Thucydides (2. 81. 8; 7. 31. 5) mentions Acarnanian slingers, as does Xenophon (*Hell.* 4. 6. 7). Pollux, in the list of ‘craftsmen in arms’ in his *Onomasticon* (1. 149), mentions the Acarnanians as being famous for their use of the sling.

On Acarnania’s fertile plain ringed by mountains, the local shepherds became skilled with the sling in defending their flocks from predators. They can be compared to those of the ancient Balearic Islands, where the slingers ‘in pitched battles... crush both shields and helmets and every kind of protective armour. And they are so accurate in their aim that in the majority of cases they never miss the target before them. The reason for this is the continual practice which they get from childhood’ (Diod. 55. 18. 4).

The effective range of the sling established by experimental archaeology is 50–100m, the accuracy falling off rapidly with distance. In modern competitions held on the Balearic Islands a 50cm (c.19in) target is placed at ranges between 20m and 40m (22–44 yards), and competitors hit it with more than half their shots (Robertson 2016, 30–34).

Archers

The 3,000 archers were clearly recruited beforehand, and Crete was the most obvious source. Cretan arrowheads have been recovered from sites in the territories occupied by Pyrrhus (though Cretan archers also served among Antigonid and Roman forces operating in the same areas later in the Hellenistic period, notably during the Second and Third Macedonian Wars). At the battle of Asculum, Pyrrhus placed them among his elephants (*P.* 21. 6).



Cretan barbed arrowheads excavated 2001–2009 from the Samuil fortress in Ochrid (ancient Lychnidus). (Photo Pasko Kuzman)

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ancient sources

Appian of Alexandria (AD *c.*95 – *c.*165). author of Greek *Roman History* in several books, dealing with different peoples whom the Romans had fought against.

Demosthenes (384–322 BC), Athenian lawyer and politician.

Dio Cassius or Cassius Dio (AD *c.*155 – *c.*235), Roman author of 80-book Greek history of Rome up until AD 229.

Diodorus (Diod., *c.*80–20 BC), Greco-Sicilian author of 40-book *Library of History*, a compilation of earlier sources.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus (Dion., *c.*60 – after 7 BC), Greek historian based in Rome, author of *Roman Antiquities* up until First Punic War.

Eutropius, author of ten-book *Breviarium ab urbe conditam*, a survey of Roman history up until the death of the Emperor Jovian in AD 364.

Florus, author of a brief *Epitome of Roman History*, covering events up until the closing of the temple of Janus by Augustus in 25 BC.

Frontinus (*c.*40 – 103 AD), prominent Roman engineer and author of a book on *Stratagems*.

Herodotus (*c.*484 BC – *c.*425 BC), ancient Greek historian, whose *Histories* is an ‘inquiry’ into the origins of the Greco-Persian Wars.

Justin, 3rd-century AD author of a Latin universal history.

Livy, contemporary of the Emperor Augustus who wrote a history of Rome up until that date.

Orosius (AD 385–420), whose *Historiae Adversus Paganos* (‘History Against the Pagans’) was one of the main historical sources on antiquity used in medieval Europe.

Pausanias (*c.*AD 115–*c.*180), author of *Periegesis Hellados* (‘Description of Greece’), which is an invaluable travel guide to the ancient ruins of the southern Greek mainland.

Pliny the Elder (AD 23–79), Roman naval commander and author of a *Natural History*, who died during the eruption of Vesuvius.

Plutarch (AD *c.*46–120), author of a set of parallel *Lives* which compare famous Greeks and Romans, and of the *Moralia*, a series of individual essays.

Polyaenus, 2nd-century AD Macedonian author of a book on *Stratagems*.

Polybius (Polyb., c.200– c.118 BC), cavalry commander of the Achaean League, who wrote a detailed *History* outlining the rise of Rome in the years 264–146 BC. Died aged 82 after a fall from his horse.

Strabo (63 BC–AD 23), author of a 17-book Greek *Geographica*.

Zonaras (Zon., AD 1074–1130), Byzantine author of 18-book *Extracts of History*, covering from the creation of the world to the death of Alexius in AD 1118.

Modern works

Boardman, John, *Greek Gems and Finger Rings: Early Bronze Age to Late Classical* (London, 1970, rev. ed. 2001)

Carapanos, Constantin, *Dodone et ses Ruines* (Paris, 1878)

Carter, E. Coleman, ‘The Sculptures of Taras’ in *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 65 (1975), 1–196

Chorémis, Angelos, ‘Metallic Armour from a Tomb at Prodromi in Thesprotia’ in *Athens Annals of Archaeology* 13, 1 (1981), 3–20

Dakaris, Soterios I., *Archaeological Guide to Dodona* (Athens, 1971)

Dintsis, Petros, *Hellenistische Helme* (Rome, 1986)

Garoufalas, Petros, *Pyrrhus King of Epirus* (London, 1979)

Hammond, N. G. L., *Epirus. The geography, the ancient remains, the history and the topography of Epirus and adjacent areas* (Oxford, 1976)

Mylonas, Georgios E., article in *Praktika tēs en Athenais Arkhaiologikēs Etaireias* (1965), 85–96

Robertson, Peter, *Iron Age Hillfort Defences and the Tactics of Sling Warfare* (Oxbow, Oxford, 2016)

Scullard, H. H., *The Elephant in the Greek and Roman World* (London, 1974)

Sekunda, Nicholas Victor, *Hellenistic Infantry Reforms of the 160’s BC*, Foundation for the Development of Gdansk University, Monograph Series Akanthina no. 1 (Gdańsk, 2006)

Sekunda, Nicholas, *The Macedonian Army after Alexander 323–168 BC*, Men-at-Arms 477 (Osprey, Oxford, 2012)

Sekunda, Nicholas Victor, *The Antigonid Army*, Foundation for the Development of Gdansk University, Monograph Series Akanthina no. 8 (Gdańsk, 2013)

Vokotopoulou, Ioulia, ‘Phrygische Helme’ in *Archäologischer Anzeiger* (1982), 497–520

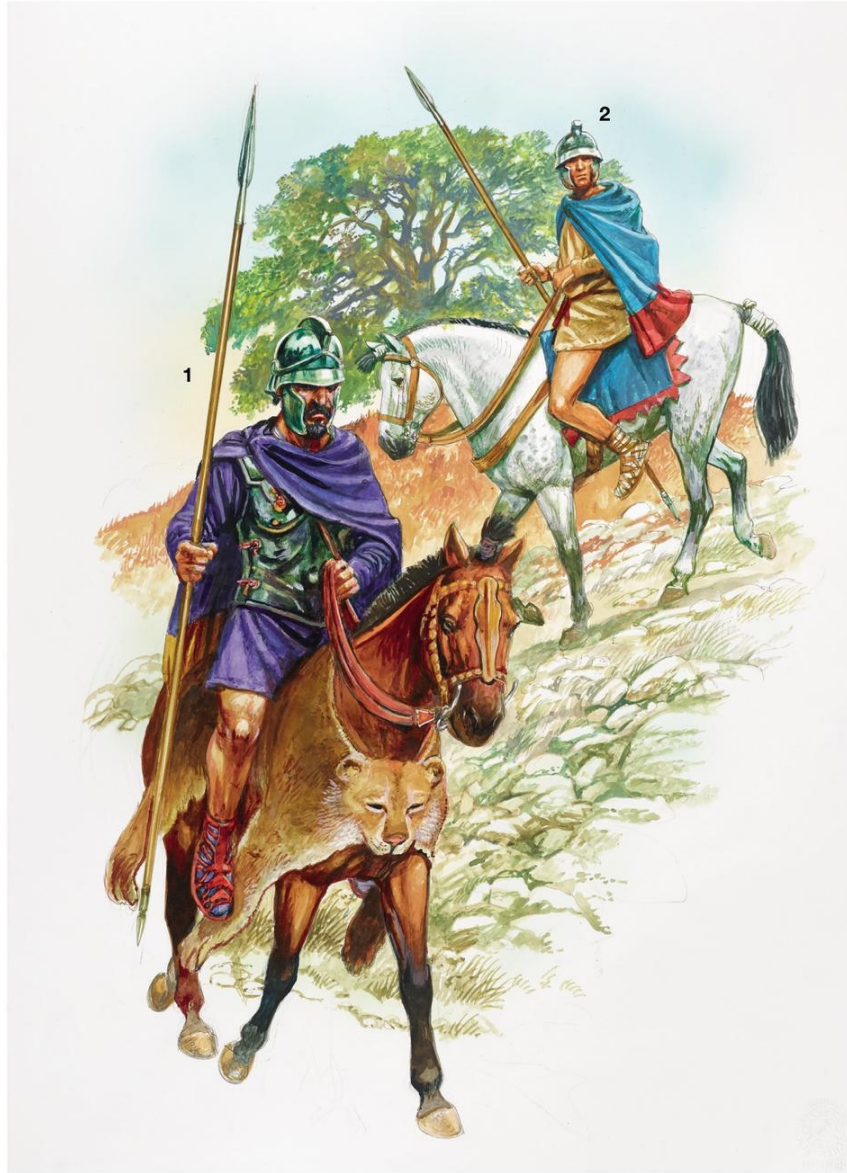
Völling, Thomas, ‘Römische Militaria in Griechenland: ein Überblick’ in *Journal of Roman Military Equipment Studies* 8 (1997), 91–103

Winkes, Rolf, ‘The Pyrrhus Portrait’ in (eds) Tony Hackens, Nancy D.

Holloway, R. Ross Holloway & Ghislaine Moucharte, *The Age of Pyrrhus*,

Archaeologia Transatlantica XI, Papers delivered at the International Conference, Brown University, 8–10 April, 1988 (Providence, Rhode Island, & Louvain-la-Neuve (1992), 175–188

PLATE COMMENTARIES



1: 'Friend' – Molossian courtier
2: Groom

This and **Plate B** are both relevant to the reign of King Alexander I of Epirus (r. 342–326 BC).

These figures are based on armour and weapons found in 1978 at the village of Prodrumi, where a tumulus covering two burials was excavated. The burial can be accurately dated to 350–325 (Chorémis 1981), so almost certainly within the reign of Pyrrhus's great-uncle Alexander I. They included an iron muscle cuirass; two iron helmets, one silvered; and an iron sabre with a recurved blade and the hilt in the shape of a crane's head. The sword, and therefore the other grave-finds, almost certainly belonged to a member of the Molossian elite cavalry regiment. Although the grave was found in the territory of ancient Thesprotia, the deceased were likely to be members of the Molossian court.

A1: 'Friend' – Molossian courtier

The long-sleeved tunic (*chiton cheiridotos*) of sea-purple was borrowed from the Achaemenid Persian court; it was the mark of a 'companion' at the Macedonian and Molossian courts, while the Macedonian cloak of sea-purple with a deep saffron-yellow border was the mark of a 'friend'. He wears the silvered helmet from Prodrumi.



The finds from the Prodromi tumulus; the silvered helmet and iron cuirass, left, are those reconstructed in **Plate A1**, and note the crane-hilted recurved sabre at low right. (© Hellenic Ministry of Culture & Sports, Ephorate of Antiquities of Thesprotia, Archaeological Receipts Fund)

A2: Groom

The nobleman's 'groom' (in the medieval sense, his squire) wears the second iron helmet from the graves at Prodromi. The forelocks and tails of the horses would be fastened in bindings in the Achaemenid manner; in the case of 'friends' and possibly 'companions' the bindings would be dyed sea-purple.



1: Molossian general
 2: 'Royal page'
 3: Molossian infantryman

B1: Molossian general

In the background is the small temple and the ancient sacred oak, by now with only a few living twigs on the remaining branch.

The general is based on a bronze figurine from Dodona. He wears the sea-purple tunic of a 'companion' of the Molossian court, the long sleeves dating the figurine to no later than the second half of the 4th century BC. So too do the bronze greaves with 'garters', comparable to those from 'Philip's Tomb' in the Great Tumulus at Vergina. The cuirass worn by the Dodona figurine may be Etruscan; it certainly resembles depictions of the linen or composite *linothorax* on the contemporary 'Amazon Sarcophagus' from Tarquinia. After the sacrifice of an ox to Zeus, the general holds its liver for divination.

B2: 'Royal page'

Grilling the ox's entrails on long skewers over the altar fire, this well-born teenage boy is wearing a short white cloak (*chlamys*), a brown tunic, and white boots, identical to those of Macedonian 'royal pages'.

B3: Molossian infantryman

This figure represents a group of soldiers who would have been present at such a ceremony. A major feature is the shield, whose opposing thunderbolt motifs are copied from Molossian coins, with colours restored. The other is his helmet, of 'Phrygian' type; its skull is based on the Vitsa helmet, and the cheekguards embossed with 'moustaches' on those excavated at Dodona (pages [here](#) & [here](#)). He wears bronze greaves with red leather 'garters', like B1, and a red tunic. He might also wear a composite cuirass; these resembled the conventional layered-linen *linothorax* but were reinforced with metal scales, either covering the whole breast or arranged in patterns on the surface.



1: King Pyrrhus of Epirus
 2: Epirote phalangite
 3: Officer of Macedonian phalanx

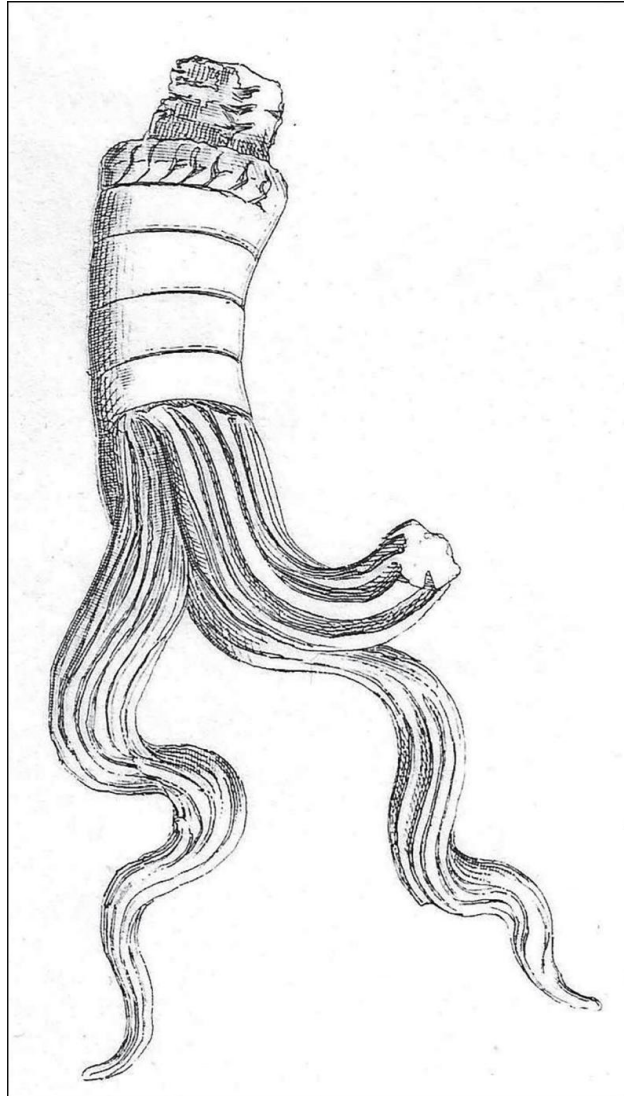
C1: King Pyrrhus of Epirus

Here Pyrrhus is appealing to Macedonian troops to change sides – not an unusual event, during wars fought in great part by troops of brief, opportunistic alliances and by mercenaries.

The king showed ‘in the aspect of his countenance more of the terror than of the majesty of kingly power’ (*P.* 3. 4). It is difficult to unravel Plutarch’s precise meaning, but it seems reasonable to assume that Pyrrhus had a ferocious appearance which inspired fear. Strangely, Plutarch continues that ‘Pyrrhus did not have many teeth, but his upper jaw was one continuous bone, on which the usual intervals between the teeth were indicated by slight depressions’.

There were statues of Pyrrhus in Athens and Olympia (Paus., 1. 11. 1; 6. 14. 9), but nothing remains of these. A bust thought to portray Pyrrhus was found in 1757 in the Villa dei Papyri near Herculaneum. Although bearing no inscription, it shows a diadem (a cloth scarf wrapped around the head under the helmet), and so portrays a king. Shortly before his

death in battle at Argos, Pyrrhus removed the diadem 'that distinguished his helmet, and gave it to one of his companions (*hetairoi*)' (*P.* 34. 1). Arguing strongly for the identification as Pyrrhus is the helmet's decoration with a wreath of oakleaves, sacred to Zeus Naios at Dodona. Nevertheless, we read that Pyrrhus's helmet at Beroea was decorated with a 'towering crest and goat's horns' (*P.* 11.5), neither of which appear in the bust from the Villa of the Papyri. The identification of the latter, by the Dutch scholar Jan Six, has therefore been rejected by many, including Winkes (1992), but it is the only possible source we have. Perhaps Pyrrhus chose to wear less striking armour after the personal attack on him at Heraclea in 280, and the bust dates from this later period? The system of two straps fastened to studs on the opposite cheek-piece is shared with Italian helmets of the Montefortino type, and may indeed be borrowed from them. The shape of the helmet is certainly Hellenistic, having parallels with surviving examples.



This fragment of bronze statuary dating from the 4th century BC depicts the binding round a horse's tail, as in **Plate A**. It was found in the Sanctuary of Zeus at Dodona during the 1875 excavations. (After Carapanos 1878, pl. LX, 11)

In Argos, Pyrrhus is also mentioned as wearing a *thorax*, which could mean any type of cuirass (*P.* 34. 1). At the battle of Heraclea he wore a cloak of sea-purple shot with gold threads, and arms 'more costly than those of other men in materials and workmanship' (Dion. 19. 12. 6). At the same battle his armour was 'beautiful and glittering' (*P.* 16. 7), which suggests a metallic muscle-cuirass.

C2: Epirote phalangite

It is very likely that Pyrrhus's pikemen used Macedonian shields and pikes. His issue of bronze coins of the so-called 'shield/ helmet' type, usually dated to 274–272 BC, were more likely struck during his first

period of rule in 288–284. The oakleaf wreath shown surrounding the helmet on the reverse of the coins is surely an allusion to the oak wreaths worn by the Epirotes as ‘field signs’ to distinguish themselves from the Macedonians during Pyrrhus’s intervention of 288. Therefore the ‘Macedonian’ shields on the obverse, like the helmets on the reverse, might have been used by the Epirote phalanx – see photo on [here](#). Dintsis (1986, 68–9, 75–6) calls this helmet a *kōnos* or ‘pine-cone’, a Hellenistic term used for the *pilos* type.

C3: Officer of the Macedonian phalanx

This file-leader naturally carries a Macedonian shield. One of thousands produced by Demetrius Poliorketes for his projected Asian campaign, it bears a 12-rayed star surrounded by the legend ‘of King Demetrius’. Between the tondo and the triple rim are seven sets of eight-rayed stars within triple half-crescents. These shields were produced in such quantity that it is likely that the contingent of 5,000 Macedonian infantry which Ptolemy Keraunos furnished to Pyrrhus in 280 were still carrying them.

All ‘shield/ helmet’ Macedonian coins have *pilos* (later *kōnos*) helmets on their reverse side, so this element of the armour worn seems certain, but other items of equipment are less easy to restore. Those fighting in the front rank of the phalanx, at least, would wear additional body armour. Lacking other evidence, we have restored the gear depicted on the funerary stele of Nikolaos son of Hadymos (Hatzopoulos, Juhel 2009). The helmet shown on the ‘shield/ helmet’ coin struck by Pyrrhus is without crest or cheek-guards; other coins in this series have these features, so as C3 is an officer we have reconstructed them, as depicted on a coin of the 270s struck for Antigonos Gonatas.



1: Megacles
2: Trooper

D1: Megacles

Following the attack on Pyrrhus by Oblicus at the battle of Heraclea, the king exchanged his armour and cloak with Megacles, 'the most faithful of his *hetairoi* and the bravest in battle'; the exchange proved to be a death sentence for Megacles. Pyrrhus took from Megacles his *kausia*, *thorax* and a cloak of a colour that Dionysius (19. 12. 6) describes as *phaios*. Megacles was presumably fighting in the ranks of the 'royal squadron', which allows us to reconstruct their dress. In Greek the term *phaios* means grey; when applied to clothing it was the colour of mourning, so a very dark shade, nearly black. The colour of Megacles' *kausia* is not mentioned; the figures painted in the Agios Athanassios tomb invariably wear white ones. Megacles held the court rank of *hetairos* rather than *philos*, and so he has been given a white *kausia* rather than one coloured sea-purple. The *kausia*, a felt beret, was normally considered to be the distinctive national headgear of Macedonia, but its use spread; for instance, the Aetolian Dorymachus wore one in 219 (Polyb. 4. 4. 5). The type of cuirass worn by the royal squadron is unknown; we have restored

a composite cuirass of the colours worn by all the cavalrymen in the Agios Atheniaos tomb, which is probably Antipatrid in date. However, a grey-black and white composite cuirass is also possible, as is a muscle-cuirass.

D2: Trooper

This ordinary cavalryman wears the same dress as Megacles. His helmet is based on a specimen formerly in the Axel Guttman Collection (see [here](#) – present whereabouts unknown), similar in shape to the bust from the Villa dei Papyri. An alternative would be that worn by Achilles on the coin struck in Locri (see [here](#)). Helmets of that type, copied with remarkable consistency, later appear on coins struck by the Bruttians, and on Roman coins. It is probable that the Bruttian and Roman coins were merely copying the design of the helmet on the Locrian original, though it is possible that the image may represent actual helmets worn by Pyrrhus and his army. The helmet type is classified by Dintsis (1986, 94, 125) as 'Corinthian', though it has the same distinctive 'folded' ear- and neckguard as a Boeotian helmet (Dintsis 1986, 5 n. 23, 20).



- 1: Arcanian slinger
- 2: Epirote *logades*
- 3: Cretan mercenary archer

E1: Arcanian slinger

These figures are imagined as if responding to an alarm in the defences of an Epirote camp protected by a bank, ditch and abatis. The small bronze *peltai* used by all these light infantrymen would have been manufactured centrally, so they probably all bore the painted monogram of Pyrrhus (see **E3**).



The portrait bust from the Villa dei Papyri near Herculaneum, interpreted by the scholar Jan Six as depicting Pyrrhus (**Plate C1**), and now in the Naples Archaeological Museum (Inv. 6150). Note the oak wreath on the helmet, and the external fastening of the cheek-pieces on the chin; in views from rear angles the end of the kingly diadem is clearly visible hanging down the back of the neck.
(Photo Gaius Stern)



The funerary stele of Nikolaos, son of Hadymos, from the modern village of Gephyra on the Axios river – the site of the ancient city of Herakleia. It dates from the very end of the 4th or beginning of the 3rd century BC; the long-sleeved Persian style of tunic was unusual at that late date. He clearly wears a muscle-cuirass with shoulderguards, and greaves covering the knees; compare with **Plate C3**. (Photo Pierre O. Juhel)

No depictions of Acarnanian slingers have survived. From Trajan's Column we know that much later Roman slingers were equipped with shields and sidearms, and carried spare bullets in the fold of their cloak. We do not know if this unit was mercenary or an allied contingent. I have suggested elsewhere (Sekunda 2012, 42) that one distinction of mercenary troops in Macedonian employment may have been tunics bearing vertical stripes from shoulder to hem, which meant that they were in service. Mercenaries in Macedonian service wore the *kausia*, and the same may have been true for such troops in Epirote service. We reconstruct him with a white felt *kausia*, a brown Macedonian cloak with a deep white border, and a brown tunic with two narrow white vertical stripes running down from the shoulders.

E2: Epirote *logades*

The source for the Epirote peltast is a copy of an original Hellenistic painting in the House of the Menander in Pompeii, which I have argued shows an Antigonid peltast (Sekunda 2013, 47–8). This man is restraining one of the large and fearless Molossian hounds, which were famous as guard dogs in the ancient world.



Bronze helmet formerly in the Axel Guttman Collection; see **Plate D2**. This example has the head of Athena at the front beneath the embossed frontal band, which terminates with a roll in the form of a *gorgoneion*. Shadowed here, the steep neckguard recalls the Phrygian style. (Private collection: photo © Christie's Images/ Bridgeman Images. CH5052365)

E3: Cretan mercenary archer

This figure is based on a Hellenistic grave relief from Kakodiki in the White Mountains of Crete. He wears a white head-cloth (which may have been replaced by a white *kausia* in Epirote service), and a white tunic with two narrow black vertical stripes running from shoulder to hem. The satchel and the diagonally-slung quiver are clearly depicted on the grave relief – see [here](#).



1 & 2: Light cavalrymen
3: Mercenary *thureophoros*

F: TARENTINE ALLIES, 281/280 BC

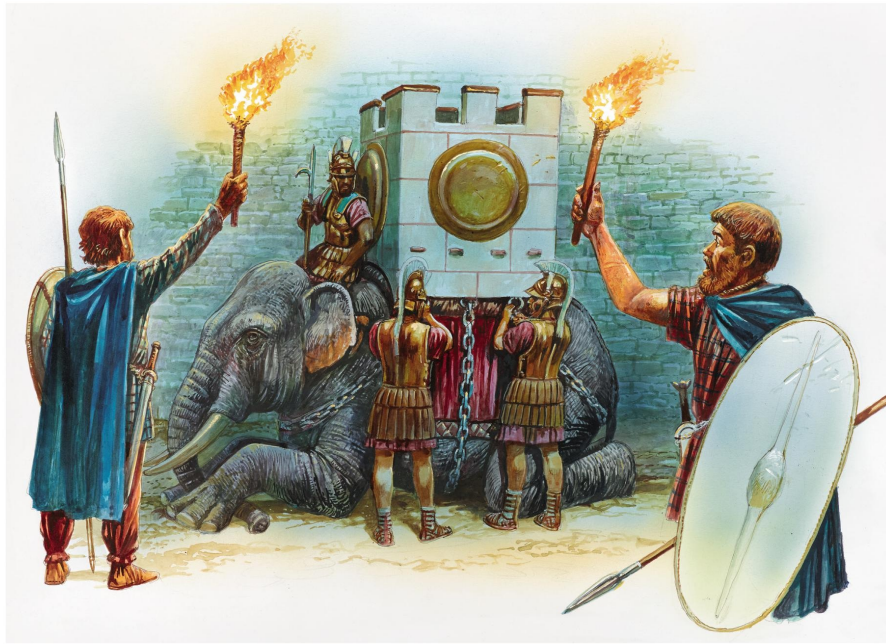
F1 & F2: Tarentine light cavalrymen

These were missile troops, who fought from a distance. Both figures are based on coins dating to the hegemony of Pyrrhus in Tarentum. Each of them holds two spare throwing spears, quite long, in his left hand, along with the horse's reins, and a third in his right hand. Both riders appear to wear variants of *pilos* helmets with horsehair plumes. Their shields resemble the traditional hoplite type in shape and size; F1 has the dolphin symbol of Tarentum as his shield blazon, and F2 an eight-rayed star of unknown significance.

F3: Tarentine mercenary *thureophoros*

Based on the only known sculpture from Tarentum depicting a soldier of this type. His wide bronze protective belt, and an exceptionally short tunic which rises at both hips, are typically Samnite features. He is holding a recurved sword, and carrying a thrusting-spear and a shield. The Tarentum sculpture is missing the head; we have reconstructed him wearing a 'generic' Hellenistic helmet, though a Samnite pseudo-Attic

type might have been expected. He is perhaps one of the Italiote mercenaries in Tarentine employment.



G: EPIROTE ELEPHANT, 272 BC

Pyrrhus's elephants ran into unexpected difficulties during the attack on Argos in 272:

'At dead of night Pyrrhus came up to the walls of the city, and found that the gate called Diamperes had been thrown open for them by Aristetas, [which was] undiscovered long enough for his Gauls to enter the city and take possession of the marketplace. But the gate would not admit his elephants, and therefore the towers had to be taken off their backs and put on again when the animals were inside, in darkness and confusion' (*P.* 32).

The elephant and its crew are based largely on the 'Capena plate' (see [here](#)). The 'towers' of Seleucid elephants held four soldiers at Magnesia (Livy 37. 40. 4) and at Bethzacharia (1 *Macc.* 6. 37), which latter reference tells us that these superstructures were made of wood, fastened on the back with a special harness. The Capena plate shows a 'tower crew' of two, but this may be an artistic convention for one crewman in each corner. The tower is attached to the back of the elephant by a series of chains, seen more clearly in a famous terracotta from Pompeii showing one of Hannibal's elephants; that source shows

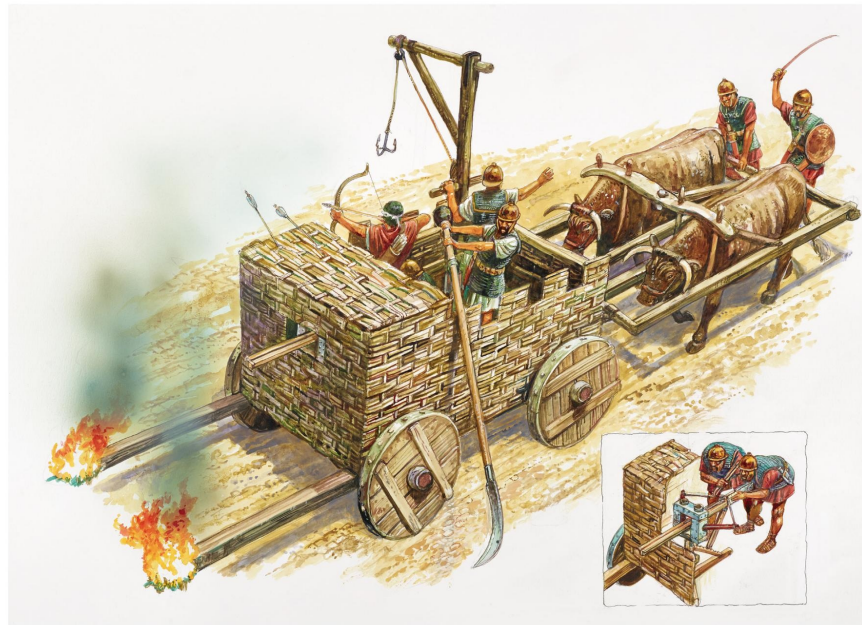
the tower as painted in imitation of masonry, and with a bronze hoplite shield suspended on each face. Both sources show a 'saddle-cloth', which must have been padded like a mattress under the edges of the tower. In this scene the javelin-men have dismounted to help take the tower off the elephant (see quoted passage above). The Capena plate shows them wearing bronze helmets with a white central crest and white plumes of some kind on each side; the Indian *mahout* also seems to wear one, together with a bronze muscle-cuirass. To control the animal, he carries a goad or *ankus* with a sharp point and a hook, but a passage in Plutarch suggests that animal and driver might have a close relationship.



Epirote coin featuring a Molossian hound; see **Plate E2**. They were famous in the ancient world for their excellence as guard dogs (Lucretius 5. 1063–72). Aristotle (*Hist. An.* 9.1.2) writes that they were superior for shepherding 'by reason of size and of courage in facing wild animals'.
(Drawing by Natalia Kozłowska)



Hellenistic grave relief, now lost, from Kakodiki in the White Mountains of Crete. Depictions of Cretan archers are rare, and this is particularly interesting for the details of equipment and dress it shows; see **Plate E3**. The head-cloth can be compared to the traditional Cretan *sarikaki*; in Epirote service it may have been replaced with a white *kausia*. (ex M. Guarducci, *Inscriptiones Creticae* II, p.88)



H: ROMAN ANTI-ELEPHANT WAGON, 279 BC

This entirely speculative reconstruction is based on Dionysius's description of the 300 wagons that the Romans deployed against Pyrrhus's elephants at the battle of Asculum. These were stationed 'outside the battle-line', protected by light-armed troops. The Romans 'intended to shoot fire and various missiles' (Zon. 8. 5), so some of the wagons presumably mounted a catapult or *ballista*. Dionysius says that the wagons were fitted with wattle screens, and were 'propelled' by oxen (presumably pushing from the rear, since teams pulling from the front would be fatally vulnerable to arrows). He also provides a detailed description in 20. 1. 6–7 (trans. Earnest Cary):

'These wagons had upright beams on which were mounted movable transverse poles that could be swung round as quick as thought in any direction one might wish, and on the ends of the poles there were either tridents or sword-like spikes or sickles all of iron; or again, they had cranes that hurled down heavy grappling-irons. Many of the poles had attached to them and projecting in front of the wagons fire-bearing grapnels wrapped in tow that had been liberally daubed with pitch, which men standing on the wagons were to set afire as soon as they came near

the elephants and then rain blows with them upon the trunks and faces of the beasts. Furthermore, standing on the wagons, which were four-wheeled, were many of the light-armed troops, archers and slingers who threw sling-stones and iron caltrops, and on the ground beside the wagons there were still more men.'

The obvious questions that this leaves unanswered are: How many 'movable transverse poles' with blades or spikes were mounted on any one wagon? Did a single wagon mount a *ballista*, bladed pole/s and a crane, or were these all alternatives? Were these weapons in addition to archers/slingers, or were the mounted weapons and missile troops alternative loads? How were the front poles with flaming grapnels attached – rigidly as in this reconstruction, or (as the wording about their use in action seems to imply) movably, like the poles with blades? And, of course, how was a wagon with a 'pushing' ox-team effectively steered?

The description remains an intriguing mystery, but it does seem clear that such 'engines' were indeed used at Asculum. The wagons were immobilized by archers and slingers, and when the elephants halted their crews threw javelins down from the towers; Pyrrhus's light-armed troops operating with the elephants then cut through the wattle screens, and also hamstrung the ox-teams.



Iron recurved sabre, with crane-headed hilt; see **Plate F3**. This specimen was excavated by Carapanos from the Sanctuary of Zeus at Dodona, and is now in the National Museum (EM Kar. 856). The weapon has been bent double below the hilt, ritually 'killing' it; this indicates that it was dedicated by the owner, probably an Epirote, as his possession rather than as war booty. A very similar example comes from Prodromi; the slight differences between the two can be put down to the individual swordsmiths, but their owners may even have belonged to the same regiment.

(Author's photo)

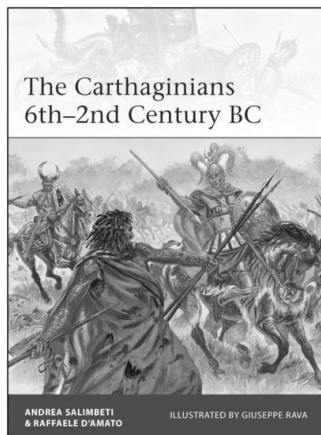
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

NICHOLAS SEKUNDA was born in 1953. After studying Ancient History and Archaeology at Manchester University, he went on to take his PhD in 1981. He has taken part in archaeological excavations in Poland, Iran, and Greece, and participated in a research project on ancient Persian warfare for the British Institute of Persian Studies. He has published numerous books and academic articles, and is currently teaching at the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology in Torun, Poland.

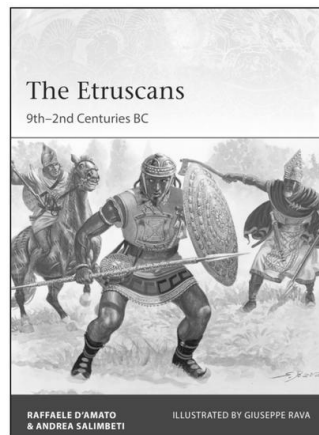
ILLUSTRATOR

PETER DENNIS was inspired by contemporary magazines such as *Look and Learn*, leading him to study Illustration at Liverpool Art College. Peter has since contributed to hundreds of books, predominantly on historical subjects, including many Osprey titles. A keen wargamer and modelmaker, he is based in Nottinghamshire, UK.

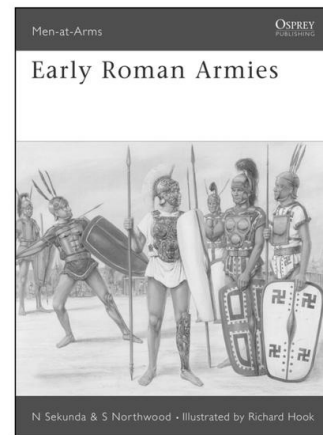
Discover more at www.ospreypublishing.com



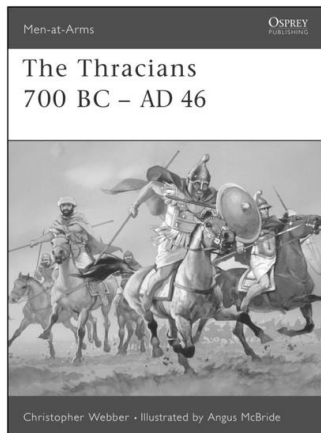
ELI No: 201 • ISBN: 9781782007760



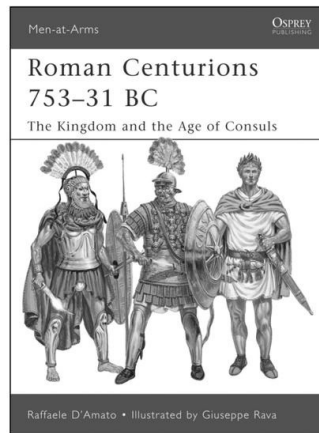
ELI No: 223 • ISBN: 9781472828316



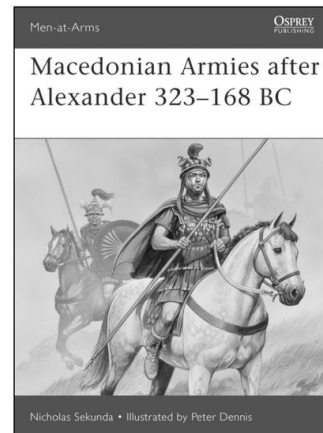
MAA No: 283 • ISBN: 9781855325135



MAA No: 360 • ISBN: 9781841763293



MAA No: 470 • ISBN: 9781849085410



MAA No: 477 • ISBN: 9781849087148

OSPREY PUBLISHING
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
PO Box 883, Oxford, OX1 9PL, UK
1385 Broadway, 5th Floor, New York, NY 10018, USA
E-mail: info@ospreypublishing.com
www.ospreypublishing.com

OSPREY is a trademark of Osprey Publishing Ltd

First published in Great Britain in 2019

This electronic edition published in 2019 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.
© Osprey Publishing Ltd, 2019

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior written permission from the publishers.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

PB ISBN: 9781472833488
eBook ISBN: 9781472833648
ePDF ISBN: 9781472833631
XML ISBN: 9781472833624

Editor: Martin Windrow
Map by www.bounford.com
Typeset by PDQ Digital Media Solutions, Bungay, UK

Osprey Publishing supports the Woodland Trust, the UK's leading woodland conservation charity.

To find out more about our authors and books visit www.ospreypublishing.com. Here you will find our full range of publications, as well as exclusive online content, details of forthcoming events and the option to sign up for our newsletters. You can also sign up for Osprey membership, which entitles you to a discount on purchases made through the Osprey site and access to our extensive online image archive.

Acknowledgements

Primarily I would like to thank Richard Brzezinski and Martin Windrow, for their help in editing down to size an unwieldy and garbled text; and Richard Evers, who saved me from several historical slips – any remaining mistakes are my responsibility alone.

I must also record my gratitude to those individuals and institutions who have generously allowed me to use their illustrations: Dawid Borowka, Richard Evers, Gaius Stern, and Dominic Chorney of A. H. Baldwin & Sons Ltd. Thanks are also due to Natalia Kozłowska for her excellent drawings, and to Mariusz Mielczarek and Inga Głuszek. Finally, I am very grateful to Peter Dennis, for his heroic reconstruction work in bringing my ideas to life in the colour plates.

Artist's note

Readers may care to note that the original paintings from which the colour plates in this book were prepared are available for private sale. All reproduction copyright whatsoever is retained by the publisher. All enquiries should be addressed to:

Peter Dennis, 'Fieldhead', The Park, Mansfield, Nottinghamshire, NG18 2AT, UK

The publishers regret that they can enter into no correspondence upon this matter.